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Riley Robert



**LETTERS TO X**

TO  
SPEEDWELL  
AND  
HENRY

# LETTERS TO X

FROM  
H. J. MASSINGHAM

"True virtue is indeed nothing else but true taste."—*Fielding*.

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## PREFACE

THESE letters were written two, three and four years ago, many of them, indeed, before the war. I come back to them, therefore, almost as an *alter ego*, almost in the guise of the grim, impartial critic who will read them and judge them. But why should the conceit of my later maturity assume that I could have written better ones to-day? If they are bad, I am no better; if pleasant enough, no worse. I will commit myself no further than to say that they are different from what they would be, if I wrote them now. Some things I meet here full in the face, I now see as through a glass darkly; others, casually visiting these pages, have come to live with me. Above all, if not wiser, I am certainly older and sadder than when I wrote this book—not two, three and four years older. For these are times when we outpace our years. The old gentleman who prods me with the tip of his sickle and forces me into a run, enables me all the same to look backwards in a fuller perspective. At least, such as they are, I can see youth in these letters, a youth I can never expect to compass again. I fancy, too, that I still possess enough of present youth to laugh both at and with the plumper youth of the past. Wherefore, go little book!

H. J. M.

June, 1919.



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# LETTERS TO X

## I

### PROLOGUE

MY DEAR X,

If I refuse to waste my time defining and expounding you, you must put it down to your name, which is insulted by explanation. I may as well acknowledge you *ab ovo* an excuse for discharging upon you a series of undress reflections about English literature old and new, accompanied by an odd topic or two for the sake of diversity, not, however, meant to be quite so irrelevant as they may appear. You are, besides, an excuse for my not confining these letters to the exact contours of the essay—a form rather too rigid for my purpose. There I leave you—a rival in the affections of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, upon the coast of Coromandel.

So many of the old worthies have lavished their discontents upon their own times that I am exposing myself to the arm-chair philosopher by going and doing likewise. Well, and supposing one could huddle them all into these *anni diaboli*, is it not possible that the fires of their own contemporary ills might grow pale and ineffectual to them?

Indeed the maladies of the world seem to me to be

so desperate that it is incumbent upon a mere reader and reviewer like myself at least to refer to them obliquely and to examine his own scanty armoury for weapons of defence. It is useless for him to brawl against the brawlers or to snatch up a flintlock against a machine-gun (which would happen to him if he downed tools as a henchman of letters to enroll himself as a private of what Fielding called "politics"). It is true that the critic and the reader have been the common butt of the wiseacre from generation to generation—though for what purpose great men write books, except to be read and judged, if not in their own time in another, I cannot tell. At any rate, there seems to me to be a metaphysical value in good reading and quiet reflection which is none too obvious to this generation, and which, being a platitude that has become almost a paradox, is constructive and profitable.

It is for men of affairs to make communities ;\* it is for men of books to remind them and their charges of the godly benefits of humanism. Firmly should humanism preside in the pulpit and the senate-house, but it does not preach of hell, and mild is its rod of office. "It sheweth more wit," said Fuller, "but no lesse vanity to commend oneself not in a strait line but by reflection," but I feel justified in being an office boy for literature, for the sake not of the office boy but the literature. I cannot but feel (despite some individual examples to the contrary) that a nation which loves letters is a nation of

\* I once put it to one of these incredibly romantic personages that it was his business to give to the world, and not to take. At once his countenance had letters of fire written across it—"These literary men!" But inasmuch as these "men of affairs" have made of the world not communities, but manure heaps, it seemed to me high time to call in the "unacknowledged legislators."

gentlefolk (in the undebased meaning) and that a nation of gentlefolk is a chosen people.

That innocent-seeming word “ tradition ”—does it not slide the roof off a legion of devils? In younger days, when I used to read problem plays and take myself desperately to task, because I could not like them, literary tradition formed insidiously up with Tariff Reform. It might have been a member of the Primrose League. But nowadays I am convinced that all literature depends for its life upon a choice of traditions. Therein lies the salvation of letters from a mere predestination—in the element of choice. It does not indeed take away from the difficulty of this plea that one has to steer a wary course between the devil and the deep sea—as well as to reckon with the misinterpretations that literary tradition has to put up with. But once define this devil and this deep sea as anarchy and impotent conservatism (not infrequently allied in the hurly-burly of latter-day social affairs) and literature is already on its posture of defence. So much on its defence that I mean to use this opportunity for putting a couple of quotations at the head and front of these letters to serve as their polemic, their summary, their apology and the instigation I had in attempting them. The one is from Henry James, to my mind the profoundest critic who has blessed us since Coleridge: “ It takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition and an endless amount of tradition to make even a little taste and an endless amount of taste, by the same token, to make even a little tranquillity.” The other from Sir Joshua Reynolds’ “ Discourses ”: “ The only food and nourishment of the mind of an artist is found in the great works of his

predecessors. ‘Serpens nisi serpentem comederet non fit Draco’ is a remark of a whimsical natural history which I have read. . . . However false as to dragons, it is applicable enough to artists.”

But, as this letter is introductory and I desire neither to forestall its offspring nor to give a false impression that I have the least intention of writing a stiff and ponderous *ad hoc* treatise, I will, except for a statement, a question and a suggestion, go no further. Literary traditions, unlike secular ones, cannot lose their meaning; do the moderns ever ask themselves whether they want to become a part of tradition—for posterity? And literary tradition can surely be as democratic in effect (witness the old ballads) as in aim and feeling it is aristocratic.

An indispensable part of tradition is form, for form is the guarantee of survival. By that I do not mean to say that all the literature that has survived into our century has been rescued from forgetfulness by the elixir of form. Obviously, composite motives and circumstances account for these preservations. What I do mean is that form is so vital and (in the full and achieved literary result) so indistinguishable a part of literary expression that the artist cannot be accepted or judged as having carried through the significance and purpose of his art without it. I will call upon Henry James again: “There is no complete creation without style any more than there is complete music without sound.” Does not this imply not only that form is to be stretched just about as far as it will go (like the ox-hide with which Dido mapped out Carthage) but although there are a multiplicity of forms that there is only one Form?

These forms may or may not unite or correspond with form, but the form itself is the ultimate defiance of oblivion. Form therefore interprets tradition, in the sense that it makes the past coeval with the present ; in the sense that it is even more present and actual than that present itself. Form and tradition are the defeat of time ; the present is merely its army in the field. Dr. Johnson said, “When you have matter, you will easily find form,” and though he might have thundered against my so committing him, there is a great deal to be said for a theory that style should be automatic upon the realization of the material. More, at any rate, than that which conceives it as a superimposition upon the material.

Here indeed is the source of all those easy errors of definition which are heaped on the back of form. It has become almost an axiom that a champion of form must refer back to the eighteenth century. But (leaving out of account its manly prose) I deny that the eighteenth century had form ; that Pope had form. Form is not a matter of diagram, of carpentry ; it is more even than a matter of proportion.

To give all this ambiguous discussion at least a negative solidity—it is not technique. From this point of view I can drag Swinburne in by the heels as a very present help—Swinburne who achieved not form, but forms, not music, but tunes. Swinburne possessed a full-toned, an incomparable technique, not form. He imposed upon and made too much of what poetic substance he possessed. His attitude to it was not unlike that of an advocate in the law-courts, who is supposed to say the same thing in several different ways. The speech of Swinburne is a diluted speech.

Lamb, on the other hand, had style and form—Lamb, the conscious artist of ramification, of superb digression and irrelevance. For, with this irrelevance, with this digression, Lamb hardly wrote an essay in which the purist could strike out this sentence and that sentence and yet preserve the entity and continuity of the essay. So with Donne and Browning, whom you may call the changelings of our literature. To my mind it is preposterous to deny form to Browning. His form was mobile rather than static, but it was there—the fledged and shining phœnix adventurously winged out of the ashes which were once the strenuous fires of the artist's encounter with life. Has Donne too nothing but the harsh and crabbed metrical result of an intellect intently and curiously at work upon a boundless passion? Read “*The Apparition*” and behind the almost intolerable hate which seems to devour its victim heedless of anything but its appetite, there is a kind of tranquillity, of repose, a sense of all said and all finished which is the sense of form making tolerable that hate and endowing it with even a moral elevation. And his language is precisely fitted to his rich, profound and analytic thought. No, the question is not—form or no form, but whether form is a living or a dead thing. I fancy that the people who flout it find it convenient to regard it as dead. Form, indeed, is vision contained and made manifest; forms may or may not be an exercise. Art comes not to destroy but to fulfil the law.

I can see that this is becoming a cautionary rather than an introductory letter. But with the assumptions of the superior person on one's right hand and the catchwords of the man in the street (who is so ascetic that he can

live on air—mostly heated) on one's left, is it to be wondered that I am filled with *caveats*? The formalities I conceive to be the adversary as much as the anarchies and the war made them monstrous twins.

For a mere technical proficiency may be and often is the obverse, the complement of formlessness—the dragon whose hundred mouths devour us. It would be well for this generation to learn that chaos resides in institutions, that appetite and confusion prefer a polite exterior and that out of the decencies and correctitudes of society, politics and business, out of the savage materialism that governs them burst the war. Out of the war itself burst not only the naked and ravening malformations of the pit but the precise little disciplines and regimentations of man's soul and mind which clap this fair world between a couple of sandwich-boards. Coercion and incoherence have struck up a strange fellowship.

So that the servant of literature has something of a mission towards his fellows—literature that laughs at locksmiths and academies and is the rich emblem of order, peace and repose. Mankind cannot be dragooned into learning what is good for it—though it can be it seems into experiencing what is bad for it. But it can be softened and consoled by persuasion to a sweet alternative—that if there is a transitory winter there is also a perpetual spring and that literature is a rough imitation or a pallid echo of the voice of God, the apple of the human mind and at least a counter to blood and newspapers.

## II

### SATIRE (I)

MY DEAR X,

You would perhaps agree with me that the surest way of realizing what satire is would be to take a mental card-index of the satirists. Drum them over in your head—Lucian, Voltaire, Swift, and so on—and the name is a sign-post to the thing. But look at the matter a little more closely and its boundaries seem to turn into rivers, to melt and twist and flow into other territories. Satire, in its restricted meaning, is the most definite, if one of the most varied in method, of the arts. But any kind of offensive directed against society is satire by implication. The implicit suggestion therefore becomes satire proper by that kind of process which Stendhal calls “crystallization.” It detaches itself and forms a body and outline of its own. In this letter then I mean to begin by rambling about satire, in so much as it is part of, a subconsciously impulsive force of an art that has a wider and more general signification.

The history of literature, with all its whirligig of fashions and exclusions, has never at any period ostracized the satirist. Even the crystal Elizabethan age, that reintegration of the human spirit which welcomed tragedy not as reality but as an adventurous exercise for

literary dexterity, is as replete with satire as it is empty of criticism. True, its legitimate application is pretty well confined to the Puritans, who disliked pleasure on principle, whether manifested in bawdry or rhymed bucolics. But the most exuberant darlings of the Muses also shared the passion of complaint. The gay Dekker rails at prostitutes; the brilliant and raffish journalist Thomas Nashe (our English Aretine) writes "Christ's Teares over Jerusalem" and strikes an attitude at London; Robert Greene repents his vagabondage and grasps the occasion of applying his particular to the universal; Bacon out of the glooms of his calculating soul constructs a Fabian New Atlantis that might have served Belloc as an example of the dim historical beginnings of his Servile State; the parfit gentle Spenser exterminates the Irish with jets of poisonous ink; Shakespeare writes, "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry."

I repeat that I am using satire in the generic sense, which it does not externally possess. I am casting the widest net I can—including, that is, under the title-page of satire, irony and indeed any continuous criticism of society and letters, whatever cloak of fiction, poetry or imagination that it may wear. I would even throw Montaigne into so wide a definition, though he is neither a satirist nor an ironist within the letter, but rather a connoisseur of life—combining a personal taste with easy detachment. Lamb too, who is not unlike Montaigne (especially as translated by Florio), and essayists of his colour, might at a pinch be recruited. Not so Hazlitt, who in his art is a man of action and pugnacity. John Synge, who became, for a time, a light-headed fashion

and has now been shelved, needs no compulsion. He is a born (and trained) satirist and a singular example of that rarest artistry which can combine the most sardonic appreciation of contrasts with a glorious prosperity in poetic discovery and passion.

The Elizabethans employed satire for literary rather than for moral purposes. They had discovered it as a new continent of feeling, an orchid in the rich cornucopia of offerings to the Muses. In the next age, when literature extended its conquests no further afield, but mined deeper within the territory it had won, satire assumes more shape. Marston, Bishop Hall and Donne wrote verse with a definite satiric purpose, but only Donne, daffing aside bombast and invective, realized the art of satire. It was the age of the first Stuarts—with a scientific ardour, violent spiritual reactions, and a philosophic insight that made it nearly the most profound of our literary history—which really delivered the tender monster, satire, into the world. Ben Jonson is the orthodox satirist, but what infinite, dark-moving, massive, ghostly, sombre and terribly beautiful shapes of satiric suggestion are evoked by Shakespeare, Massinger, Ford, Webster, Middleton, Burton, the Bible translators, Donne, Milton and Sir Thomas Browne. “*Troilus and Cressida*” of course is pure satire—satire (for all its personal bitterness) within the most precise and most imaginative meaning of the term. You will insist that here I am confusing tragedy and spiritual curiosity with satire. But satire as I suggested is not necessarily an accompaniment to a set piece. Loosely defined, it is an artistic prompting, unable to gratify itself on account of its contact with the foes of beauty. The satirist’s idea

of beauty is so tremendous (and perhaps so impossible of achievement) that he has to remove mountains of encumbrances before his faith can become operative. More substantially it is Man's doubtful spirit moving on the face of the waters.

Precedence in satire is usually given to the eighteenth century, and the claim (in spite of a good number of exceptions really finer than it could produce) must be allowed. Surely satire to be good must be based upon taste and discrimination, moral and artistic. The satirist is so appalled by the prevalent bad taste that he discards his peaceful occupation, sharpens his ploughshare into a snicker-snee and falls upon the Philistines. Now eighteenth-century taste is in many respects debased enough. Look at the transition in book engraving from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century ; at the false classicism of the Augustans ; at the mechanical conceptions of technique in poetry ; at the fencing-in of the literary acreage to so many square yards of cultivated soil ; at the coffee-house etiquette of amenities ; at its abominable bowdlerising of Shakespeare ; at its grotesque pseudo-Gothic—its most promising symptom of salvation, since it actually had the hardihood to admit the claims of the literature of another age as worthy of imitation. This is how the good Bishop Percy waxes judicial upon "The Ballad of the Nut-Brown Maid" : "Indeed, if it had no other merit than the having afforded the ground-work to Prior's *Henry and Emma*, this ought to preserve it from oblivion."

But if these disfigurements took their toll of the charms of satire, there were plenty of redeeming qualities to the age that heightened them. The good sense of the period,

the moderation and lucidity of its prose, its firm understanding of exactly where it stood and exactly what it wanted, even its confinement of literature to club standards and exclusions had a powerfully educative effect upon satire. They gave it the self-conscious, independent maturity that it had lacked in the previous century. They gave it a cheque-book and a latch-key. Henceforward, its twenty-firster over, it was launched upon a career of its own. I think it possible that, in any other circumstances, the sheer bourgeois weight of the age might have smothered satire. What the eighteenth century did was to disentangle that satiric part which belonged to a composite literary whole and make that part a whole in itself.

But there was a cost and a penalty attached. The imaginative element was left out, just as in Wordsworth's *ode the man takes leave of the spiritual relationships of his boyhood*. But it got stability and self-confidence. It knew itself. In the eighteenth century a good deal of edifying precept (false when you look into it) overlaps into a good deal of sound doctrine. Satire by its very nature ignored the one and learned its style of the other. Once in possession of a sound style of its own, it was ready, as the seasons went their course, to make thereof an instrument of beauty.

### III

#### SATIRE (II)

MY DEAR X,

In this letter I intend to justify the discursive rights of the epistle and to write less about the principles of satire than the various practices of the satirist. The one may perhaps suggest the other. A partial excuse is that satire and its relations with literary and social changes are, like yourself, *terra incognita*. Obviously the genuine satirist is an idealist, to be moved only indirectly by personal affronts, failure or injustice. Pope would hardly have been a satirist at all had he not been weakly, vindictive and ambitious. Topham Beauclerk once asked Dr. Johnson why Pope had written the couplet :—

“ Let modest Foster, if he will, excel  
Ten metropolitans in preaching well.”

Said the Doctor, “ Sir, he hoped it would vex somebody.” Pope was not possessed of the universal vision. The great satirist’s concept of beauty needs to be very fine and true for him to realize so acutely what distorts it.

For all that, his energies cannot be measured by the social and political corruptions under whose shadow he lives. Why are there so few satirists to-day? Is Government so enlightened as to throw them out of work, or so

reactionary as to stifle their expression? Fortunately it is usually so stupid as to be unconscious that their shafts are aimed at its own hide. Perhaps the explanation is that the period parodies and caricatures itself so outrageously that nothing is left for the satirist to do. If you, he addresses the public, haven't a ghost of a notion what an exhibition of themselves your governors are making, what on earth is the good of my telling you? For this self-parody is so flat and gross that the true satirist, alert to artistic as well as to moral criteria of excellence, disdains to be a copyist.

For if in quite modern times the satirist has gained in the area of his operations, he has lost in effectiveness. Modern society, as I suggested, offers so many vulnerable targets to his archery that decent workmanship is handicapped. He cannot see the wood, not so much for the trees but because the wood has grown into a forest. Stick up a single post and you aim at it deliberately and without distraction; stick up a thousand and, in the assurance of hitting one of them, you aim at random. That is one reason which makes Belloc's "*Caliban's Guide to Letters*" one of the most finished and deadly satires of the twentieth century. It is exclusively directed at one poison—literary pretentiousness—not at a whole pharmacopeia. Thus Belloc's masculine style keeps a tight hold upon his subject, and he selects almost ruthlessly.

Indeed, with so much distracting material open to the moderns, still greater demands are made upon the satirist's style and form than a simpler community would exact—to enable him to choose and to contain it. From that point of view I may glance at Samuel Butler. There

was something at once monumental and elvish in him, and he reminds one more than twice or thrice of Dr. Johnson. But what attaches him to my random discourse is his quite inimitable style. He is the example by excellence of the happy marriage between style and satire. I should like too to write copiously about Dr. Richard Garnett, whom this age has so strangely forgotten. Yes, it has forgotten "The Twilight of the Gods," an excellent illustration of finely used irony. In its own way it makes an indissoluble match between style and meaning.

Compare him with the greater Anatole France, in that way of masking his batteries with such innocent-seeming urbanity. In France they would have encouraged him, and I cannot but believe that we latter English do not like irony, partly because we do not understand it and partly because we would not understand it. Why should we? Satire breaks the spell of our absorption in the present. It sees men, not infinite in capacity and in action like gods, but pitiable, shrunk, agitated under the impassive arc of the heavens. Calm and tranquillity it *must* have. How hard it is for the satirist to break from the surging, gesticulating crowd in the present! How strenuously must he strive to control the twitching of his limbs and the rolling of his eyes! Modern civilization generates a modern type of individual, who is its peculiar darling. I mean that restless, discordant, dissatisfied, doing-as-against-thinking being who is at his liveliest in business, letters and politics. War is the natural state for such creatures, because it is the macrocosm of their own internal states. A society dominated by such men can never produce satire, though they themselves are so

vulnerable to it. For it is one of the ironies directed at satire itself that the satirist realizes that he must (to fulfil his art) keep his mind clear of the heady fumes of the present, or he may be and is stupefied by them into inactivity.

Belloc is, I think, the one genuine satirist of our times. Chesterton—brilliant as he is—is too flighty and opinionated for the solid, concrete, almost sculpturesque quality of the satiric genius. His verse is a very different matter. Bernard Shaw is rather baffling, because he has never quite made up his mind between pamphleteering of the old-fashioned type and satire. "*John Bull's Other Island*" is really fine satire—it grasps and transforms into a lucid artistic whole the complex play of hostile ideas between two countries. But Shaw is not really quite big enough to form a complete artistic satire. He is more frequently the combatant than the artist. Also his taste is sometimes dubious—witness the lyrical effusions of "*Candida*." As clever as, though so much more correct than Lucifer, he does not seem to get much further than rating people for their lack of common sense. In some ways he reminds you of an orator apostrophizing an audience (the Victorians) who are no longer there, owing perhaps to that love of verbal counterplay which spoils so much of his work. But what jolly things he has done! I call to mind a dashing article of his in which he rewrites the last scene in "*Macbeth*" as Wells and Bennett respectively would have handled it in their novels. As for Wells himself he is so handicapped by an abominable style, by a lack both of restraint and of inevitable intuition that he has done little more than mirror in his own temperament the restless surfaces of things.

The younger school, alas! has little to say for itself. Gilbert Cannan has adherents; but he works painfully, and uses larger canvases than he can manage. He has, I know, both written satire and discussed its theory. But I can no more believe him to be a satirist than a modest, discerning and agreeable writer. He just hacks about with a meat-chopper. He possesses neither style, nor condensation, nor strength of mind, nor ironical apprehension, nor detachment—all or some of which are the midwives to the birth of satire. As a writer, he possesses talents (no more than talents). But for satire, he has no natural or acquired disposition whatever. Had his work that satiric quality which so many people claim for him, it would have been the coherent entity it certainly is not. His characters would have acquired a new distinctness and momentum, the frayed edges would be cut away, the over-elaboration fined down, proportions kept, and some central purpose imperceptibly and *implicitly* impressed upon the reader. His novels seem to say: "That is what life is—a surge of base and beautiful forces, intensified in the consciousness of man." But that is a fallacy. Life is like that to the layman, but it is the business of the artist to see a clue in it, to give it shape and order, to weld its particles into congruity. Here is where his lack of a constructive or satiric purpose growing out of and controlling the material tells to his hurt. He knows life in the raw, but the satirist would put it in the oven and dish it up. So he wanders in the dark, and we blunder after him. But we want light, if it be only from a tallow candle.

Squire is a parodist pure and simple—a very adroit and almost intuitive observer of styles and mannerisms. He

is of the chameleon type, which takes its colour from its environment, soaks it up, and for the time being actually becomes part of it. Such impressionability makes a good parodist, but is a danger to the satirist and critic. Neither in him nor the others is there anything to touch the admirable perspective, the large and copious presentment, the detached mastery of "Emmanuel Burden," or the fancy, delicacy and artful carelessness of "Letters to Dr. Caliban." There is true artistry—the men and styles satirized exceeding in sharpness of outline and incisive strength their tamer originals.

There is one kind of satirist who points his finger not at man but at God. One remembers the pity and terror of that story of how a friend of Lamb's met him escorting his sister across the fields to the asylum, both weeping bitterly. Of such the arms of the Titan besieging Olympus. Ibsen partly belongs to this school, in spite of the greater part of his subject-matter. "Brand," for instance, is partly heroically and partly satirically treated, and I defy the reader to interpret Ibsen's mind at the end. James Thomson, Thomas Hardy and Leopardi are certainly of this persuasion. The stanzas in "The City of Dreadful Night" (dedicated to Leopardi) are the writing cut in the granite wall for the affrighted cherubs. No wonder that he set down Dürer's "Melancholia" with such a Miltonic might of description. How inevitably in those pages their twofold despair corresponds! Thomson indeed refutes in the variety of his achievement those pedants and schoolmen who will have it that such beleaguerers of a remote and impassive heaven are mad or liverish or just morbid and disagreeable blasphemers. For Thomson also wrote those verses so full of pathos,

quietism and tender cheerfulness about taking his girl to Hampstead and on the Thames. Hardy's position is not so simple. His god is pagan, Judaic, and the executioner of a casual fate. He speaks in "Time's Laughing-stocks" of "his blind, unweeting way." So he exhibits tragic and delicate personalities crushed in the paws of this brutish divinity. But the point is that Hardy does not even create the illusion of the impartial, impersonal operations of an inhuman fate. He himself usurps the office of the executioner. It is he and not fate who hangs the children of Jude (as gross and *irrelevant* a misuse of art as the hanging of Gloster in "Lear"), and dogs the flight of Tess through the world like a bloodhound. "The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." No—"I have finished." It says a good deal for the sombre stateliness of Hardy's genius (of which I am an admirer—this side idolatory) that the reader, while conscious of this unconscious arrogation, is not repelled by the author's assumption of the presidency of the Immortals. I am inclined to think that the more epic Hardy's work, the better satirist he is. This epic quality achieves its broad perfection completely in only one novel, fragmentarily in all the others. His novels so often betray an extraordinary clumsiness and old-fashionedness (in its bad sense) of treatment, that the marriage of epic and satire has its banns prohibited time and again. Marty South in "The Woodlanders," Fanny's dying tramp to Casterbridge in "Far from the Madding Crowd" are in the most consecrated and solemn pose of the epic; but the novels themselves are on a diminished scale. But "The Mayor of Casterbridge" is epic throughout, and the figure of Henchard acquires

at the end (which is like the close of some mighty hymn) a truly Sophoclean grandeur. One reason, I suspect, is his dependence on arbitrary accident for a course of destiny involving character. In "Far from the Madding Crowd," for instance, there would have been no story at all but for Fanny's going to the wrong church to marry Sergeant Troy. But in "The Mayor of Casterbridge" there is a wonderful tragic rhythm between character and its consequences, between humanity and fate. There satire moves at ease: in the other novels it is cut too closely to the author's purpose. That purpose, like everything in Hardy, is rugged and noble, and even at its most nihilist, captures our sympathy and evokes our imagination. For we feel through it Hardy's hatred of comfortable optimism—that insufferably complacent optimism that awards future blisses and penalties for the "right" and "wrong" sort of people. At any rate these haughty and massive satirists who arraign God have an advantage over those who arraign man or his rulers. They get the universal into their work more readily, and are less liable to be disoriented by the complexities of our planet at its latest and most progressive advance in time. But I have wandered enough, and you justly call for a halt.

## IV

### SATIRE (III)

MY DEAR X,

It looks as though I should still go ambling on in my spavined way about satire for another thousand or so words. But courage ! The stable turrets cubistically cut the baffled air in my sight ; the oats in the manger en-fragrance the wind in my titillated nostrils, and the straw pallet rustles in my metaphysic ear. Therefore, ye soft pipes, play on.

Prose satire I think is independent of literary periods, because it is self-contained in all. Rhymed satires—apparently easier and less finished embodiments of discontent than prose—seem to fulfil themselves piecemeal. They are usually too long and lend themselves to chance felicities and detached ingenuities. Hence their adaptability to the heroic couplet and to quotation. In grouping forces so as to present a united and ordered front they will not bear comparison with prose. What sandy, waterless tracts there are in Hudibras and “The Rosciad” ! How Dryden’s muscular strain, Oldham’s virulence and Pope’s diabolical cleverness and acidity defeat a coherent artistic purpose ! Chesterton, of course, has shown what can be done with verse forms, and his restless dissent is more properly housed within metrical walls. Personally

I think his verse is extraordinarily good—wonderfully fresh, happy and pointed. His good ale is not drunk from the cup. Byron too is superb and very rarely tedious. Dr. Johnson, that great man whose greatness cannot be exaggerated, also upsets my theory by the Juvenalian force, the cumulative terror, the finely judged weight of “London” and “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” Johnson was a pure humorist as well. Massive, many-sided Doctor, that giant brain of yours could surely almost bear the iron circlet of all the follies of the world!

For all that, with a curtsey to verse, prose carries the honours from sharp-witted Lucian to Anatole France, one of the greatest satirists in the world. It is courting disaster to lay down formulas for the structure of prose satire, but I am inclined to think that it is more successful the less personal it is. It is not only that the satiric faculty demands a condensed material and a severe treatment. Its method exacts a harmony and proportion of line which can only be achieved (forgive me for underlining the point) by distance and detachment. It can almost become a formal mosaic without essential loss. Ill-fitting masonry, looseness in the component parts, unkempt phraseology and its total impression is marred. Topical as its subjects often are and relative to ephemeral events it must work, so far as is possible, from the particular to the universal. It is realistic to its undoing. The modern fashion of realism makes a point of combining the personal element with the scientific method—reflecting (as the copyist is bound to do) the queer co-partnership between system and disorder in social and political life. Satire will and must have nothing to do with either of them. It is a part of art and of tradition,

not of observation. In every age it has its peculiar problems, points of vantage and specialities. But it tests, refines, remodels and transmutes, not according to the standards of the problems, but its own. It employs a kind of human alchemy upon them which, while absorbing into its crucibles the different material of the various ages, makes the satiric motive, the satiric process and the satiric conclusion, in all ages, virtually the same. To exhibit things not as they are but as they should not be (and so should be) is the aim of the satirist. Cast your eye over the satirists in the backward of time and see how frequently their properties are fabular. (Lucian, Voltaire, Andersen, Butler and Dr. Richard Garnett, to mention only five.) In Congreve the dramatic form did service for the fabular, which is an exterior device for creating the illusion of remoteness. "Gulliver's Travels" is not one, but many satires, strung on a connecting thread, each one with its distinct and separate device. A single ironic sentence in the course of a narrative will arouse the sensation of being hurried away from the issues of the moment. I repeat that the nature and disposition of satire are something other than the chaotic substances from which it draws its subject-matter and its moral. That is true more or less of all artistic processes, but positively of satire—a kind of solid and globular planet floating in the void. One sees how it differs from parody, whose office is to stick close to its model, colouring and heightening its effects by a few neat touches of the brush ; and from caricature, whose workmanship is like that of a school of engravers in the Jacobean era, who wrought by deliberately distorting perspective.

I can imagine the impression of these vague definitions

upon you, since I am so little satisfied with them myself. What I want to emphasize is the artistry of satire—as distinguished from its moral qualities. Obviously its motives are moral conviction and, in many instances, moral indignation. But the stimulus must not be confused with the final result. Is there any one who will deny that Swift's Laputa, Brobdingnag and Lilliput are superior as works of art to his Houyhnhnms and Yahoos? For in these latter he lost his balance and detachment. Text-books chatter about his "*saeva indignatio*," discovering that temper indiscriminately in all the divisions of "*Gulliver's Travels*." But in the earlier portions it is in correspondence with other and modulating agents; in the last it is undisciplined, torrential, washing away the last supports of the author's sanity. Pathetic, kingly, tortured Swift! Forbidding the dragons of man's folly and cunning from devouring the beauty of the world, as Canute forbade the encroachment of the waves, and at last mentally overwhelmed by his perception of their irresistible advance!\*

Until we climb the last slopes of Utopia, satire with its accusing, revealing question, "*Quo tendimus?*" can never but be of benefit to humanity. As the keeper of the national conscience (forgive my triteness) the satirist, if he is approved of his own generation, will be a Record Office for posterity. For satire is no less a religious vocation than most other forms of art.

In all the human and artistic gifts within the reach of the satirist Cervantes was rich. He possessed what the

\* Of course, I agree that to read about the Yahoos nowadays is much more satisfactory than it would be in another age. Laputa is so tame and sensible!

worldly and respectable mother of eighteenth-century letters could not give her children—imaginative reason and creative truth. Of what discoveries is the spirit of art capable, when we consider the significance of Don Quixote? Is he the scapegoat of Cervantes, as the narrative directs? No, he is his hero, his archangel a little damaged. Don Quixote designs too literally his plans for building a Jerusalem in the pleasant land of Spain; but it is the world which, buffeting him and so the splendours of which he is the warden, must bare its breast to the spear of the satirist. He is ridiculous, not because his search for truth was too impetuous, but because the world, confusing the search with the impetuosity, so thinks him. There is of course a double edge to Cervantes' masterpiece, but the edge that is not blunted by time is the forlorn idealism of Don Quixote. That meaning is what makes his recantation so terrible a comment upon life. For Don Quixote, if he did not wait upon opportunity (as every man should), waited upon God.

Finally, let me declare that at the bottom of the truest satire is the pearl-bed of human sympathy. That sympathy is not the same thing as idealism, one of the strongest motives of the satiric passion. What I mean is human sympathy—released into a large human tolerance. Some of the satirists are richer in it than others; some bring the treasure nearer to the surface. What is behind the wisdom of Rabelais and the wit of Montaigne but the golden fire of “live and let live”? It is a fire, not a mere adage, and Rabelais has thought good to feed it from all the vast store-houses of his learning and imagination. And Montaigne a cynic? In life, just as the honest man is so frequently taken for a fool, so a tolerant

man passes for a cynic. Montaigne was indeed naïve in his human curiosities. He was tolerant of follies and frailties, for one reason because they gave a sauce and fillip to his kindly inquisitive inspection, for another in order to excuse himself. He is indeed almost the only satirist who is personal ("I must speake of others but that I may the more speake of myself") and is not a moralist. He truly fits into the *nihil a me* adage. How different he is from Voltaire, who is always pretending not to be a moralist, but cannot logically avoid it!

Swift indeed lost his sympathy for man, and I am not sure that his satiric genius did not tear him in pieces in the end on that account. He took a gloomy pleasure in the operating theatre, exclaiming with the tyrant—*Ita feri, ut se sentiat emori.* Fielding had that bounteous tolerance which blesses him that gives and him that takes, and Fielding wrote "Jonathan Wild." Meredith, indeed, I think not—in spite of the fact that "The Egoist" has become a classic and is perhaps the only work of imagination in its century that has really affected people's way of thinking. It may be its very manifest defects of manner only that urge me thus to except it—it may be because the egoist is as much Meredith as Sir Willoughby Patterne, or it may be simply that I cannot take to Meredith, that he repels me instinctively. I still think that Meredith was too much absorbed in himself to possess this supreme quality of satire. Browning, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens, Lamb—they all had it. Arthur Symons says of Lamb that his irony—an irony dressing all the delicious things of life, "sun, the greenness of fields, society, the cheerful glass, jests and innocent vanities" with a sharp sauce—saves his almost

divine goodness from insipidity. Would it not indeed relieve something of the terrors of death to think of God as something like Lamb? Henry James (in the van of the ironic immortals) had it overwhelmingly. Jane Austen, a born satirist, can, I admit, be very feline—but she had more than a pinch of it. Nearly all the satirists possess that gift of God in their several degrees, not in spite of their satire, but because of it.

## V

## PHILOBIBLON

MY DEAR X,

I hope you will forgive me for occasionally privateering among the galleots of the past. Now the publisher who will again reprint Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon* will deserve well of his country. Many writers have sung the praise of books, but none like Richard de Bury. He alone is among the prophets ; he is the patriarch of book-lovers, and Erasmus and Southey and Lamb are mere commentators beside him. He lived between 1281 and 1345, and was a devoted and distinguished public servant of Prince Edward of Windsor and Queen Isabella, receiving as his due the bishopric of Durham. He was the friend of Petrarch. But these things, and the fact that he was Treasurer and High Chancellor of England, are trifles. He was, first and foremost, a lover and collector of books. He had more books than all the other English bishops put together. He had a separate library in each of his numerous residences, and so many books lay about his bed-chamber that you could not move or stand without treading on them. Every day at table a book was read to him, and, if a guest were present, he would engage in discussion on the subject of his reading. He felt towards books what Dante

felt towards Beatrice, Sir Thomas Browne towards antiquities, Wordsworth towards his lakes, and Cowley towards word-conundrums. We want “manuscripts not moneyscripts,” he says; we love “codices more than florins,” and prefer “slender pamphlets to pampered palfreys.”

The *Philobiblon* was first published in Latin at Cologne in 1473. It was translated into English (very haltingly) by J. B. Inglis in 1832 and by E. C. Thomas (much better) in 1888. That edition was republished in the King’s Classics by the De La More Press in 1902. The first chapter is a lyrical panegyric upon the treasures of wisdom that are contained in books. Nor has this worthiest of bishops a parched, emaciated style wherewith to express his ecstasies. “Books,” he says, “in respect of which precious stones are worthless; in comparison with which silver is as clay and pure gold is as a little sand; at whose splendour the sun and moon are dark to look upon, compared with whose marvellous sweetness honey and manna are bitter to the taste.” Truth without books is a kernel without its nut. “The written truth of books, not transient but permanent, plainly offers itself to be observed, and by means of the pervious spherules of the eyes passing through the vestibule of perception and the courts of imagination enters the chamber of intellect, taking its place in the couch of memory where it engenders the eternal truth of the mind.” Reading books is a sublime dedication for the elect:

“Ye are indeed the most delightful ears of corn, full of grain, to be rubbed only by apostolic hands. . . . Ye are the golden pots in which manna is stored, and rocks flowing with honey, nay, combs of honey, most plenteous udders of the milk of life.

. . . Ye are the ark of Noah and the ladder of Jacob. . . . Ye are the stones of testimony and the pitchers holding the lamp of Gideon, the scrip of David, from which the smoothest stones are taken for the slaying of Goliath (so that Arnold did not invent the Philistines !) . . . fruitful olives, vines of Engadi, fig-trees that are never barren, burning lamps always to be held in readiness."

Surely not the most *décolleté* folio but would swell with pride at such a peroration.

Since the value of books is "unspeakable," how pointed is their indictment against the heretics that regard them not. "A generation of vipers destroying their own parent and base offspring of the ungrateful cuckoo . . . are degenerate clerks with regard to books." You were naked and "we clothed you with philosophy, rhetoric and dialectic"; you cried out and "we gave you the breast of grammar to suck." And you pass us by! Therefore may you "be sewn up in sacks to be carried out to Neptune, or planted in the earth to fructify for Pluto, or offered amid the flames as a fattened holocaust to Vulcan, or at least hung up as a victim to Juno." But woman is the very devil—"that biped beast whose cohabitation with the clergy was forbidden of old, from which we have always taught our nurselings to flee more than from the asp and cockatrice"—she, certes, would have us converted into "rich caps, sandal and silk, and twice-dyed purple."

We were sick and you visited us not. There is none to give us "a mollifying plaster" for our various diseases. Some of us are "dun and yellow with jaundice," others "are suffering from gout, as our twisted extremities plainly show." "The smoke and dust by which we are continually plagued have chilled the keenness of our

visual rays, and are now infecting our bleared eyes with ophthalmia." "Within we are devoured by the fierce gripings of our entrails, which hungry worms cease not to gnaw, and we undergo the corruption of the two Lazaruses." (My own books are crying with the self-same voice!) Nor is there anyone to anoint us "with balm of cedar," nor to cry to us who have been "four days dead, and already stink, 'Lazarus, come forth!'" Our purity of race is diminished "by worthless compilers, translators, and transformers"; our propriety of speech is adulterated by "treacherous copyists"; we are handed over to "Jews, Saracens, heretics and infidels, who encourage our ulcers, and whose poison we dread above everything." And "the cushion is withdrawn that should support our evangelical sides." "Ragged and shivering (remember Lamb's "shivering" folios four centuries later), we are flung away into dark corners." There is, indeed, no more health in us, and it is clear, were it not for our reputation, "what infinite invective we could hurl against the clergy."

That is by no means the conclusion of the complaint of books. But I will turn to our good bishop's maxims for the proper custody of books. The race of scholars "indulge in infinite puerilities" to the books under their charge: "He distributes a multitude of straws . . . in different places, so that the harm may remind him of what his memory cannot retain." Worse, "he does not fear to eat fruit or cheese over an open book, or carelessly to carry a cup to and from his mouth; and because he has no wallet at hand he drops into books the fragments that are left." Continually declaiming his "senseless arguments," he "wets the book lying half in his lap with

sputtering showers." There is no end to his destructive faculty. When the flowers have appeared in our land he will "stuff his volumes with violets and primroses, with roses and quatrefoil" (What a modernist is our bishop!), and "will use his wet and perspiring hands to turn over the volumes." Then, behold! "at the sting of the biting flea the sacred book is flung aside and hardly shut for another month, is so full of the dust that has found its way therein that it resists the effort to close it." But there are other foes than the scholar. Often the "smutty scullion, reeking from the stew-pots," will touch "the lily leaves of books." Of the clergy he despairs. They would handle books with greater decency "if it were not that the itch and pimples are characteristic of them!" This, if you please, in face of the fact that "Moses, the gentlest of men, teaches us to make book-cases most neatly," and "the Saviour has warned us by His example against all unbecoming carelessness in the handling of books."

Farewell, thou best of bishops, more devout than Donne, more succulent than Stillingfleet, more truculent than Taylor, more hypnotic than Hooker, more passionate than Perkins, and Providence grant thee a library in heaven!

## VI

NASCITUR

MY DEAR X,

You have often peered over the rim of your knowledgeable country into the dim Inane of ours, you who have often let down the subtile hook of your curiosity into our so enigmatic vortex, you who have baited many specimens of dogma, opinion, creed and apology, jerry-built by various classes of the community through all grades from the simple to the artful and crafty, cannot fail to have hauled up that of the Spontaneity of Expression. "Nascitur, non fit" chant these priests of the Lightning God. The *Salvator Litterarum* occupies the vale of Tempē, armed with nothing but a type-writer. He is no hoplite, who staggers through a desert of erudition, encumbered with baggage, wives, concubines and camp-followers. He is, in fact, the literary evidence of spontaneous generation. Work? Would ye have the iridescent wings of Ariel droop with long-distance flights? Training? Would ye tame him to perform the "goose-step"? Tradition? Would ye mew him in the dull fence of yesterdays? Maturity of thought and conviction? Would ye clap a solid and lugubrious top-hat on his hyacinthine pate? No, sir. Let him only be a novelty and he is spontaneous as well (of course) as a genius. Let

him claim the sun for his sister, the moon for his mother, the firmament for his father, Boreas for his brother, Arcturus for his aunt, all the elements for his relations and we are content ! Let him worship Behemoth before altars of sardonyx and chrysoprase, to the reek of incense and the pungent odour of festering lilies, white-livered emblems of Scarlet Sin, and we shall adore him ! Let him clash his barbaric cymbals of door-handles and railway-girders in a Maenad rage of cacophony and we shall salute his ecstasy ! Let his alchemy transmute Pence into Pounds and we shall be the richer ! Let him lisp in infantilist numbers and we will rock his cradle ! Let him stand foursquare to the winds, belted, like the poster of a nerve-tonic, with the lightning, and tossing, in feats of high jugglery, scarred granite boulders of poetic expression, and we will cry—plaudite ! Let him show himself a patched Autolycus—a gimcrack Beloved Vagabond, with cigar-boxes and liqueur-bottles in his pack and we shall feel to radiate from him the beams of the morning of the world ! Let him weave a circle round him and catalogue with meticulous care each several object within its radius and we will find him a government post ! Let him make anagrams out of amours and asterisks, and we will give him a pension for life ! Let him jug the Hare of Reality and roast the Passional Lamb of Insubstantial Transcendentality, and we will present him with the prize gold nimbus of mysticism at a ceremonial dinner ! Let him call a spade an agricultural implement and a shot a little steel pellet ejaculated by concussion from a hollow tube of metal, and we will pay him ten guineas a column ! Let him pipe what sweet jargonings he will, and he shall have rings on his fingers, bells on his toes, and motor-

cars to ride upon wherever he goes ! These reputations !

“ Frail mushrooms, must we weep to hear  
Your fame so soon is done ?  
As yet you have not gone beyond  
The tenth edition :  
    Nay, nay,  
Your caravan away  
    Is bound  
Unto America,  
Laden with victuals, shares and beer  
    And rights of cinema.”

I am convinced that the decay of the art of reading has something to do with it all. Not reading and seeing, but the art of reading and seeing. I apologize for an epigram of mine own devizing :

Those who saw Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton  
At “ Theatre,” “ Curtain,” “ Red Bull,” “ Globe ” or “ Swan,”  
The same to-day see cinemas and con  
The Harmsworth Press and Bull not Red but John.

I am still optimistic enough to believe that the public does not quite deserve what it gets. It soon will, unless it knocks some sense into its pulpy democratic head. “ It is not without reason that we ascribe the facilitee of believing and easiness of perswasion unto . . . ignorance.” As the Odcombian Legstretcher, Thomas Coryat, remarks with solemn sententiousness in his dedicatory epistle to his “ Crudities ”: “ Methinks we want rather readers for bookees than bookees for readers.”

For all that the public is not so much to blame as those

who cater for it. I had a striking example of this only last year. A famous and most capable novelist wrote a romance which it fell to my lot to review. I said that, relying upon an earlier and excellent work which had sharpened the public appetite, he had repeated himself ever since, *ad deleteriam*, so to speak. The novelist wrote to me, and to my complete prostration agreed with me. Having the misfortune to inflate his publisher's receipts by that earlier romance, he had been practically compelled by him to perpetuate the type, year in and year out, to such an extent that the process had become practically mechanical. The author writes in fact not what his public, but what his publisher wants. And physical sensation rather than mental activity making the greatest appeal to the greatest number, too many publishers (there are, happily, a few exceptions), to swell their sales, contract for the one rather than the other. Yes, I know what you will be thinking about this letter. Such are the penalties of an explorer only sighting the frontiers of his subject.

## VII

### THE NEW JOURNALISM

MY DEAR X,

Not that people read less than they did. I believe that the average citizen who sits in a London Tube, the flies of his mind wheeling and settling over the tasty ink of newspaper columns, has pilgrimaged over an immensely greater acreage of print than Dr. Donne, whose sermons contain citations from so many learned and untraceable works, than Thomas Fuller, whose aphoristic zest pillages as many anecdotes from dusty authors as the naturalist Bates collected specimens from the Amazons—the average citizen who is reproduced in hundreds of thousands of editions. To my mind the newspaper habit (newspapers being what they are) has enervated the national psychology more than all the other alchemies which have transmuted us from England into Britain. Granted its obvious advantages—diffusion of news, intercommunication of human interests, contraction of the world from continents to columns, dispersion of social and political knowledge, and so forth—it has, alas! changed us from individuals with various heads and bodies into one small head with a myriad bodies. The old conception of a daily newspaper as a convenient digest of news (if it ever existed in fact) has been long superseded. For the news-

papers (where they do not suppress it) are careful to put their own interpretations upon the news. They have created a trust, a vested interest, not in commodities, not even in government, but in the delicate reactions of mental, emotional and spiritual needs. No wonder that a nation's collective thought and feeling are transformed under such a pressure, so widely suggestive a persuasion ; no wonder that in such downy imprisonment the natural attitudes and opinions of man to and about mankind never escape except by accident, by some odd conjunction of circumstance, by some violent invasion of reality.

O salvation to our citizen, ye News and Mails and Presses and Records and Dispatches ! The staff and scrip and wallet of his pilgrimage through life. Personality ? His littleness is multiplied by the hosts of his fellow-atoms. He is not himself, he is a species. Let him but sound his puny stave and the echoes of his fellows reverberate from Ealing to Mile End. Ambition ? The forces of the planet are potted into less than the circumference of his breakfast table. They are devoured by him, these mighty ones, with his bacon and eggs. They pass and are absorbed into the vesicles of his blood. Or rather he it is who swells, not they who contract. They do not become him but he them. He it is who maketh this electricity of forces to flicker and palpitiate into the most secret corners of space. His thumb marks the beat of the pulse of Empire and prescribes its regimen ! He has but to adjust the spectacles for which he has paid out of his salary of three guineas a week and behold he settles the affairs of nations, regulates their ordinances, directs their legislation, confounds their knavish tricks and dedicates their destinies to posterity. Security ? He is great, but

he suffers not the penalties of greatness. He is ignorant, but concise directions upon every subject worth discussion are provided him. He is sick and Demeter (assisted by trained midwives) empties her pill-boxes at his feet. He is in health—more, the lightning of vitality shall radiate from the belt round his waist. From cradle to grave he is the heir of all the ages, suckled, flattered, preened, cherished, soothed, and equipped with every up-to-date appliance of eating, drinking, talking, thinking, and feeling by the benevolent genii who are at his most devoted service. Pathetic, confiding, futile little man, with the iron ring bearing the legend “Sic volo, sic jubeo,” decorated by love-in-the-mist, through your nose !

I am referring, of course, more particularly to the ex-halfpenny press and the magazine, nor am I imputing a deliberate conspiracy of deception to all newspapers. Even one of the Northcliffean rabble is won over from profane loves to the sacred love of letters and, with some lapses, has a dignified authority won of its own merits. Some maintain a precarious existence outside the Northcliffe caucus. A few of the weeklies catch desperately at the independent tradition of the past. But quite apart from its shameful control of politics, the jargon of the daily newspaper, its exclusive use of selected phrase, plausibly and picturesquely doctored, its way of dressing facts, its *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*, its insidious method of appealing to “the plain man” and “the man in the street” (in the most ambiguous logic !), and above all the destructive tyranny of its advertisements are an unqualified evil. I am not merely puffing dogmas into the air. The Northcliffe Press in an agitation of two

months secured compulsory service during the war without any foundation at all either of factual evidence or popular will. That, as our sombre history develops, has become but an incident. So powerful has this Press become that it can inspire political intrigue, unseat Governments, appoint dictators, and ordain and enforce upon a docile community an anarchy of evil passions. Surely the "liberty" of the Press has been ironically apportioned! Jacob has added to his own the inheritance of Esau. One section of the Press is all liberty, another all obedience; the one full-mouthed, another hollow-cheeked; the one blooded, the other bled. The one uses its liberty to destroy liberty, another surrenders its liberty on the plea of one day gaining liberty. The tyrant, as Fuller said, "leaves nothing that his poor subjects can call their own but their miseries."

Morally and intellectually indeed the Press accomplishes worse. It seems to disintegrate the fibres of consecutive and rational thinking, to make a policy of hysteria, an investment of mob rule and a usury of ill ends from specious means. It shapes and glorifies the untrained mind and the unreflecting emotions. It supersedes permanence with the perishable, quietness with noise, knowledge with ignorance. The favourite child of material business, it works for an ulterior motive and a secreted gain. The seriousness of yesterday and tomorrow has no place in its counsels. Not one single idea of any value whatever has it, in all its career, contributed to national or individual thought. Its "snippets" alone, I truly believe, are responsible for the lowered standards of conversation in home and street, for that curious childishness and inconsequence of our people which,

with manhood, refuses to put away childish things and which no spectator of English life can fail to observe. Its calculated commercialism idealizes the vulgarity of the pert, the smart, the knowing.

From the point of view of literature, or even plain and decent expression, I doubt whether anybody would defend the Press. But I suppose that most people would contend that literature had nothing to do with the urgent topics discussed and fermented by newspapers. What then is literature? Is it or is it not the written testimony of men's superiority over the animals? Said Dürer: "Much learning (in the sense partly of art, partly of the artistic will and impulse to create) is not evil to a man though some be stiffly set against it, saying that art puffeth up. Were that so, then were none prouder than God who hath formed all arts. But that cannot be, for God is perfect in goodness. The more, therefore, a man learneth, so much the better doth he become and so much the more love doth he win for the arts and for things exalted." I will not urge the obvious moral.

A nation, particularly a nation the majority of whose citizens can read, cannot do without literature. I do not pretend that literature can be like money—of universal currency. But if the children of the nation are not brought up to read and become familiar with letters, to think clearly and to speak well, if the men and women of the nation are content to substitute so completely a corrupt Press for incorruptible art, in forming and guiding their attitude to life, in teaching them how to live, then there is no health in the nation. Hence in part my apology, dear X, for referring overmuch to our literary past. "The good that comes of study . . . is

to prove better, wiser and honester." Reading (I make no apology for repeating and again repeating the word and what it means) as an art makes good citizens. Indeed I would advocate good reading, if for no other reason, for the sake of recovering the lost virtues of quietness and equanimity. Equanimity is magnanimity, and quietness at long last is holiness. The man who to-day abides as still as any stone is setting his axe at the root of at least one of our modern diseases. Look down, my dear X, upon our despair and thank your stars you are not under them ! There are adventures and pilgrimages, but, thank God, there are no crises, among folios.

"Reading (said Bacon, whom, as a rule, I cannot abide) maketh a full man."

## VIII

### JOURNALISM OLD AND NEW (I)

MY DEAR X,

I suppose that the degeneration of the daily newspaper must be expected in an era when commercial values are paramount. It is certainly not the newspaper as a form of reading that is wrong. Journalism proper is, after all, as old as the Renaissance. Many of the Elizabethans were obvious journalists. They were strictly the pen-masters of the London apprentices, the "groundlings" who bellowed applause at the *Globe* and Paris Gardens on Bankside and were alternately petted and exacerbated by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Middleton and others, when the old, old duel between the Boiling Pot and the Sacred Fire was acute. Nashe, who so often gave the *passado* to strutting Gabriel Harvey, you may call our first leader-writer; Greene, the first picturesque reporter of crime; Dekker of "The Guls Horne-Booke" and "The Bellman of London" the first "fourth-page" impressionist chronicler of London manners, and Thomas Deloney "the balletting silk-weaver of Norwich" (in the genealogical lineage of the mediæval minstrel) the founder of the newspaper lyric and (in such romances as "Jack of Newbury" and "Thomas of Reading") of the newspaper serial. Seventeenth-century journalism was

principally theological, a development on a grand scale of the unspeakably tedious Martin Marprelate controversy—a tornado of pamphlets of such virulence that they threatened to brown the verdure of a more natural literature. Charles I was a religious symbol as well as a political doctrinaire, and even the politicians Marvel, Milton, Lestrange and Cleveland discharged political convictions from a theological mortar.

But I can draw very little moral from inspecting the protoplasm of journalism. To suggest a contrast and to enforce what I mean by the decay of modern journalism you will require an example of it as a modern and organized force, in an old setting. Well, why not Addison, the sententious Addison, Autocrat of the Breakfast Table? Is he not worth examining closely, not only as an illustration of journalism before it became a business, but as showing to what extent it was a compartment of literature, what kind of public opinion it created, and what were its relations with the public.

It is not legitimate to separate the literary from the historical Addison, but it is fatally easy. The reason, I imagine, is that Addison, released from his historical moorings, is susceptible to certain obvious critical remarks, which do not apply to his position in society. The one is a literary problem which has been solved without much chance of being reconstructed or modified; the other involves the discrepancies and deceptive analogies between modern and eighteenth-century journalism. Let me take these points one by one and see how actually indivisible they are. Everybody knows what the textbooks say about Addison's prose. It is the model of English urbanity and reasonableness. It is the reflection

of a mind adjusted to a polite serenity and a judicious optimism. It is decorous, complacent and discreet, thereby not only exhibiting the limitations of Addison's personality, but finishing and balancing the graces of his style. If his philosophy had been more profound, his humanity more catholic, his vision less narrow, and his feeling more acute his style, would have been a less disciplined instrument of his artistic purpose. As a critic he was the only Augustan to appreciate Milton and to read Shakespeare, regardless of Aristotle. As a satirist, he sufficiently explains himself :

"I did not design so much to expose vice as idleness, and aim at those persons who pass away their time rather in trifles and impertinence than in crimes and immorality. Offences of this latter kind are not to be dallied with and treated in so ludicrous a manner. In short, my journal only holds up folly to the light, and shows the disagreeableness of such actions as are indifferent in themselves and blameworthy only as they proceed from creatures endowed with reason."

His conception of art, as a whole, was both shallow and lucid. "I shall endeavour," he said, "to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality." But Addison, though he seldom wrote *ex cathedra* or regarded art as anything but the handmaid of morality, had not the strength of conviction to be a moralist. His paternal and conciliatory temper could only approach art as the useful appanage of a comfortable virtue. So, though didactic for his orthodoxies, he made them palatable to his readers' taste by means of the persuasions of a bedside physician. He looked upon the creative imagination as a curiosity, a kind of treachery to the genteel tradition

of writing, and as interfering with the faculty of design, which informed the whole of his prose to the last comma and meant simply “a prospect that is well laid out.” A prospect in the “ha-ha” style, with perhaps a neo-Gothic temple, where the garden merged with the landscape. At which temple, my dear X, repose with me until my next letter.

## IX

### JOURNALISM OLD AND NEW (II)

MY DEAR X,

Only, as you will agree, so formal and external an attitude of life could have written of human suffering with the priggish egoism of this passage: "When we read of torments, wounds, deaths and the like dismal accidents our pleasure does not flow so properly from the grief which such melancholy descriptions give us, as from the secret comparison which we make between ourselves and the person who suffers. Such representations teach us to set a just value upon our own condition and make us prize our good fortune, which exempts us from the like calamities." Steele, with his surer humanity and sympathy, could never have been so baldly pompous. Addison was, in fact, purely and simply a stylist. Literature was not a criticism or interpretation or the flower of life, but the accomplishment of a man-about-town, incurious of all that lay outside his immediate horizon, indulgent to the accepted frailties of his circle, self-conscious in his mission of instruction and diversion to it, and dispassionate in his observation of it. The only extraordinary thing to be got out of the survey of this prosaic and methodical artist is that a mind so mediocre, so devoid

of ideas and in many directions so prejudiced could have brought its expression in terms of style to so delicate a pitch of perfection.

All this is clear enough, if Addison is taken out of his historical perspective. It is a fair criticism of his personality, but hardly of his artistic achievement. Most of the text-books call him an essayist ; many of them the first of the English essayists—a claim which, with Bacon, Sidney, Cowley, Owen Feltham of the “Resolves,” Overbury, Earle, and Dryden behind him, has no sort of substance. Decidedly Addison was not an essayist, but an occasional journalist. He neither wrote nor created the essay ; he adapted it to daily journalism. Even that is not quite accurate. The essay is a soliloquy, and the soliloquy is a form of expression which may bring a public to you, but does not necessarily bring you to the public. What Addison did was to take over from Steele and see in it what the inventor did not, an entirely original form of social literature, which should bring him hot-foot from the press every morning to the breakfast tables of his audience. Addison had no illusions on the subject himself : “I have brought philosophy,” he says in a famous passage, “out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses.” It is this which clamps Addison so firmly to his age. The Queen Anne period, so far as the generous diffusion of rather precise and narrow literary interests was concerned, was the most scrupulously enlightened in our history. The Elizabethan literary impulse was one of many ; the literary prose tendencies of the seventeenth century were too confused and disrupted, too mutilated by the Civil War, to admit of a consistent,

unequivocal appeal; the isolated poets, essayists and thinkers of the Romantic Revival wrote for individuals and not a public, however select. Our own society is too vast, too amorphous, too fortuitous, yes, and too busy for a representative culture. After the storms of the Puritan revolution and the peace of the Restoration, the serene and uniform Augustan age created just that atmosphere of taste and judgment that Addison wanted. It was a prejudiced and limited taste, and, to some extent, a superficial judgment; but its consciousness of itself as a community made the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* its inevitable mouthpiece, and Addison its indispensable arbiter of elegance. It was ready to be entertained, but only by Epicurean ways amenable to polite sentiments that prided themselves on their virtuosity. It was accessible to sermons, so long as they were neither "barbarous" (i.e. enthusiastic), dull nor drastic. It wanted a debating society for all subjects that came within its range and comprehension, and Addison was its obvious president. It wanted an easy, discursive, tolerant and domesticated literature, spiced with chaff and amiable preaching, for leisurely perusal and to supply topics of conversation for the coffee-houses. The benignant Addison and the more human, sprightly Steele, were just the men for it.

It is when Addison is thus cut to his social cloth that his real significance emerges. If he had been more brilliant and less respectable the society which had made him their patriarch would have dethroned him. His prestige depended not so much upon his literary genius as upon the capacity of his audience to assimilate it. His primness, his mediocrity, his occasional obtuseness, his very prejudices aided rather than hindered him from

stamping and permeating the spirit of his age. His supreme inspiration was to have an educated public at his back. And if the daily journalism of the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and the *Guardian* was of great service in preserving a practical criterion of taste in his readers, of how much greater service was it to Addison's artistic quality. The exigencies of interesting those readers and of keeping them interested several times a week over a period of years kept his faculties well sharpened and burnished. Steele, with his naturally more alert and sensitive mind, would have spun his liveliness even into a theological treatise. But Addison, with his square and phlegmatic temperament, needed the spur of an intelligent and recurrent public demand to keep him braced. In other circumstances he might very well have been—he was—dull; as it was he could not afford to be. On the other hand the solid and conservative virtues of his mind invested his gossip with weightiness and good sense and cleared out of it all the fripperies and "chattiness" ("levity" he would have called it) to which the daily journalist is only too liable. Pull Addison out of his Augustan background and the plump geniality of his work is rather hollow.

Need I compare Addison's type of journalism with the daily journalism of to-day? Granted that he was a man who created a system; to-day it is the profitable system which creates and fashions the man. Addison was the arbiter (far more than Dr. Johnson, who had to combat romantic tendencies and was something of a romantic himself) of an educated age: the system, levelling all types of expression, is the deliberately illiberal arbiter of ours. Addison too not only catered

for his public nearly every day for a space of two years, but conformed to the fashion and average thought of his age. The comparison need not be laboured. It leaves him on a sufficiently high pedestal. He, Addison, was the Northcliffe of his age. Lord Northcliffe is the Addison of this. Addison-Northcliffe had his thousands of readers ; Northcliffe-Addison has his millions. The moral shows what literature can do, even with a man like Addison (the style of a humdrum journalist with ten thousand readers survives to-day as a model of English prose idiom). It also shows what business can do with a man like Northcliffe.

# X

## THE PREFATORY POEM (I)

MY DEAR X,

You are, I know, one of the arm-chair sort, and a cloud is surely the very best upholstery for spirits. There you watch poor Time being dragged by the forelock fussily through the market-place. There too you can examine geological impresses at your leisure. On turning over the work of some young Oxford poets a while ago, I noticed two or three prefatory poems at the heels of the title-page. I wonder if they realized they were, so far as modern custom goes, a relic of the tertiary period. For in the seventeenth century “Panegyrical Verses” were an art in themselves. Jacobean literature is full of them ; they even drew an asthmatic breath through the early years of the Restoration. There are, for instance, seven to the first edition of the “Matchless Orinda’s” poems in 1664—one from the Earl of Roscommon, one from Lord Orrery, another from “Philo-Philippa,” and two from Cowley. Even so late as 1684, the fourth edition of Rochester’s poems inspired a few drooping elegies from Mrs. Behn, Waller and Flatman. But they are already diluted by the water of prose “characters” from Anthony Wood, Dr. Burnet (the bosom of Roches-

ter's penitence) and other learned divines. When we come to an edition of Roscommon's poems a little later the prefatory poem is a wraith of itself—scissors and paste cuttings from the occasional comments of Pope, Addison, Dryden, etc., stuck arbitrarily at the beginning. Thus the publisher's puffs, printed shamefacedly at the back instead of the front of a book, are possibly the evolutionary proliferation (that's the kind of way the scientists talk) from the parent stock of the prefatory poem. Perhaps the literary feuds of the eighteenth century drove the friendly habit into exile ; perhaps the economy of space demanded by needy booksellers ; more probably the seventeenth century became *vieux jeu*. Nowadays, as in most other matters, the personal element has been vested in an institution and the clasping hand has a coin in its palm.

But of old the prefatory poem was a part of literary history, and I should have to turn these letters into a transatlantic thesis should I compass the subject in all its bearings. It was apt to be a little mannered, a little aware of the formalities, a little prone to play with its literary tail, fond of hyperbole and of being in at the death with a conceit ; at its worst, a set exercise. But it gives a comely and well-dressed air to a book ; is often well rounded and dignified, and at its most pompously ceremonious, never descended to the level of the average generalized eighteenth-century ode. It stayed personal. Frequently (as in Ben Jonson's address to Shakespeare in the 1623 folio and Chapman's to Jonson in the first edition of his "Works," published in 1616) it achieved a very fine level of stately eulogy. Nor is its use by any means confined to the great writers. Habington's (the

author of that beautiful poem, “*Nox nocti indicat scientiam*”) “*Castara*” (a popular book) had in the edition of 1640 only one prefatory poem from his kinsman George Talbot. Drummond had thirteen prefixed to various editions of his poems (one of them is by “*Mary Oxlie of Morpet*”), of whose authors only Sir William Alexander has crept dubiously into posterity. Fuller is lauded by ten obscure writers in the 1647 edition of his “*Holy War*,” most of them probably personal friends. A vast crop of elegies sprang from the grave of Sir Thomas Overbury, none of them signed with more than initials. Countless editions of “*The Wife*” were published, with “*characters*” of various types (the “*Franklin*,” the “*Milkmaid*,” and so on) in prose by Overbury and various hands at the end. Overbury’s sensational death (he was apparently poisoned in the Tower by the machinations of the Countess of Essex and her paramour James I’s favourite) had no doubt a good deal to do with it. Campion was implicated, you may remember, happily without any evidence of value. Overbury besides was a popular and gentle personality. The panegyrists make great play, you may be sure, with the “*Wife*” and the “*Widow*.” One of them rather strains his compliment :

“ Juno vouchsafe and Venus when I wed,  
I may behold this Widdow in my bed.”

Others take the excellent opportunity of admonishing their own recalcitrant spouses, under the aegis of such titles as “*The Cleane Contrary Wife*.”

In one of the earlier editions of Donne’s poems there are a large number of elegies from admirers—not at the beginning of the book but the end. They are a mark of

the extraordinary reverence the age so justly paid him. Carew's noble address begins :

“ Can we not force from widowed poetry,  
Now thou art dead (great Donne) one Elegy  
To crown thy Hearse ? ”

Phineas Fletcher of “The Purple Island,” an anatomical allegory (superb industry !) of the several parts of man's body, receives a poem from that curious patron of the poetic Muse, Edward Benlowes, no two copies of whose poems “Theophilia” (folio 1652) were published alike. The same book, if I may be so irrelevant to you, my dear X, contains some charmingly designed engravings by Hollar. Quarles (a prolific dedicator) has, of course, a couple of poems, commemorating *his* rather than Fletcher's genius. “My genius jumpt with thine,” he says. And he actually has the audacity to talk about his “lazy quill” ! O Lamb, too tender Lamb, why did you call Quarles and Herbert the two greatest religious poets of the century ?

The prefatory matter to Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas is a delightful farrago. There are eighteen prefatory poems in nearly all the European languages, among them addresses (in the mother tongue) from Ben Jonson, John Davies of Hereford (a dull and disputatious poet), Hall the satirist, and Daniel. There is an engraved title, a set of acrostics and anagrams, geometrical prose devices under the names of the nine Muses, exclaiming upon the incomparable merits of James I, to whom the translation is dedicated, a portrait of Du Bartas and an inconsequent series of decorations, planted like a landscape garden wherever the ingenious fancy of the printer

could find room. The author, in the true spirit of the book, has of course a commendatory poem to himself. "Hence," he says, in a religious self-esteem :

" Hence, profane Hands, Factors for Hearts profane ;  
Hence hissing Atheists, Hellish Misce-Creants ;  
Hence Buzzard Kites, dazzled with beautie's glance ;  
Hence itching Cares, with Toyes and Tales up-tane."

Cartwright has fifty-one dedicatory poems to his collected works, published in 1651. It is like a gathering of the birds in my garden during cold weather. For Cartwright was a fashion and a convention in poetry, rather more than an individual poet, and the poetic spirit was on its last legs. Will you say to me what a reviewer once said of Belloc's verses : "More of this, Mr. Belloc, more of this" ?

## XI

### THE PREFATORY POEM (II)

MY DEAR X,

Ben Jonson is the hero, the embodiment, the plume of the prefatory poem. Whenever I see the name of Ben I feel like a chorister solitarily chanting in the “bare, ruined quires” of his reputation. For to the moderns he is only a picturesque relic, with one or two mullioned windows of song, still exquisitely surviving. Or he is a harsh scholiast, a brawling toss-pot, a stranded hulk, whckled and bubukled with superfluous learning, a gnarled brow-beater of the fame of better men than himself. His high-coloured masques and pageants, his witty epigrams and apothegms, his pointed and at the same time exuberant dialogue, his copious realistic comedies (he is a pantechnicon of Elizabethan types, manners and characters), the frequent stateliness of his tragic declamation, the amplitude of genius which could create such figures as Sir Epicure Mammon—all are bundled away in the attic. The soundness and sanity of his criticism, the criticism of a fine, sagacious and fertile mind, are derided—the audacity of telling Shakespeare to blot a thousand lines! He is too almost invariably right about Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Better

for Shakespeare if he *had* blotted a thousand (or, say, five hundred) lines. And, despite the completely antipathetic nature of Shakespeare's genius, Ben's noble lines in the folio of 1623 are an obelisk of appreciation to a man who as yet was very far from being even on nodding terms with Theobald, Coleridge and Sir Sidney Lee. It were indeed enough for Ben's vindication had he only written the fifty or so prefatory poems he actually did. There has been no man of letters in English literature so generously alive to the qualities of other writers' work as this carping, crabbed Ben. No wonder that so many poets were proud to be his "sons." But you immortals, my revered X (Fielding, in an age that knew him not, said of him in the preface to "*Joseph Andrews*" that "of all men he knew the ridiculous best"), will have given him his due.

But to my muttons. Ben Jonson's profuse dedications, do they not throw an interesting light upon the drama? Until the Jacobean era proper and the semi-official patronage of the court, plays were surreptitiously published by disreputable booksellers. None of the dramatists, Shakespeare included, seem to have cared two groats what became of their work. The usual method of the booksellers was to send a copyist to the theatres to take shorthand notes of the plays. Or the theatrical managers would sometimes let them have prompt-book copies for a consideration.\* Henslowe of the Globe was, I think, one of these malefactors. So that the dignity of the prefatory poem does not encroach upon such *sansculottes*. There are extremely few examples of a dedicatory poem

\* Needless to say, this was written before Professor Pollard's remarkable book, "*Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates.*"

to the shoddily got up and printed editions of Elizabethan plays.

But there is an appreciable amount of material if you take a jump into the twenties, thirties, and forties of the seventeenth century. Fourteen dullish poems are prefixed to Ford's plays. Ford actually has a poem from Crashaw, one of the few prefatory poems of his which exists :

“Thou cheat'st us, Ford ; mak'st one seem two by art,  
What is Love's Sacrifice but the Broken Heart ?”

Massinger's works have nineteen poems—two from Sir Aston Cokaine, the knight who tried so hard to unravel the mystery of who was Beaumont and who Fletcher in their collaborations, and one from Shirley, that admirable stylist who edited the sumptuous first folio of Beaumont and Fletcher in 1647.

That folio was a splendid tonic to the vitality of the prefatory poem. There are thirty-six poems in it, many from the poets whom all generations will honour, two from the rarest of prefatorists, Herrick and Lovelace. Ben Jonson (“How do I love thee Beaumont and thy Muse !”), Herrick and Corbet appear on one page ; Waller and Denham opposite each other—a visual testimony to the fact that the transition from seventeenth to eighteenth-century taste in verse is gradual and not abrupt. Others are from Earle, the author of the “*Microcosmographie*”—character *vignettes*, in the manner of Overbury and on the precedent of Theophrastus ; Jasper Maine, the spirited translator of Lucian ; “I. M.,” who cannot be John Milton, but is probably James Mabbe, the Spanish scholar, who trans-

lated Fonseca's "Divine Meditations" and Mateo Aleman's picaresque novel "The Rogue" into the breeziest idiomatic English; Habington of the "Castara" (who, like me, is a little apt to like a gesture about his age,) —

"Great tutelary Spirit of the Stage !  
Fletcher ! I can fix, nothing but my rage  
Before thy Workes, 'gainst their officious crime  
Who prints thee now, in the worst scaene of Time."

the excellent "metaphysical" poets Stanley and Cartwright; Sir Aston Cokaine; the pamphleteer and translator of Aesop, L'Estrange; and, since all must have a finger in the pie, the stationer. "If this Booke faile," he says, burning his boats, "'tis time to quit the trade." At the beginning of this magnificent folio is a fine portrait of Fletcher by the engraver William Marshall. Lamb possessed the second folio of 1679 (*vide* "Old China"). I (down, thou autobiographical imp !) possess the first !

Beside such apparel as this Shakespeare presents but a russet appearance. There are four prefatory poems to the 1623 folio—from Hugo Holland, the mysterious "I. M.", Sir Dudley Digges and—Ben Jonson. But at the beginning is the Droeshout portrait, and that poem from Ben is surely the morning star of a constellation which, except for the first edition of "Obiter Dicta," has sunk for ever 'neath the ocean bed.

Pursuing this so delectable subject of the "Encomias-tick" with pedantic zeal, I will now present you with the brush—the ninety odd poems prefixed to "Coryat's Crudities, hastily gobbled up in five Moneths travells; Newly digested in the hungry aire of Odcombe in the

County of Somerset (the author's birth-place) and now dispersed to the nourishment of the travelling Members of this Kingdom" (1611). There is no other edition of this rare and whimsical book until the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The poems are written by many of the most famous wits, sages and poets of the day—Donne, who has three to his "Great Lunatick," Ben Jonson, Sir John Harington (no mean jester, as "*Nugæ Antiquæ*" bear him witness), Sir Dudley Digges (one of the motley four who wrote poems in the first Shakespeare folio), John Davies of Hereford, Campion, Bishop Corbet, Drake, Hugo Holland (another of the four pall-bearers), Inigo Jones, John Owen, the epigrammatist, Drayton and Henry Peacham, the author of "*The Complete Gentleman*" (in the mode of Castiglioni's "*Courtier*"), under whose signature are reproduced the shoes upon which Coryat tramped Europe, entwined with a laurel wreath.

The point of this unique series of macaronic verses is twofold. Coryat, amateur buffoon as he was at James's Court and merchant of the most ingenious fopperies in style he could devise, has not only written a direct narrative of his experiences in France, Italy and Germany, in all good faith and sober interest (only varied by the freakish naïveté of interspersing gratuitous and ill-digested scraps of classical learning), but accepts these tributes of ridicule with the most elegant and formal seriousness. That might be part of the joke, but Coryat had an excellent conceit of his book, as indeed its lively and methodical observation well warranted. Our "*Od-combian Legstretcher*" was not unlike the clown, whose tragic ambition it was to be taken seriously. Except

that, to his mind, he realized it. Poor Tom's a-cold !

For instance, “An Introduction to the Ensuing Remarks” : “The Princes Highnesse (Who hath most graciously deigned to be the Hyperaspist and Maecenas of my booke) understanding that I meant to suppress so many, gave me a strict and expresse commandement to print all those verses which I had read to His Highnesse.” Which shows that that charming figure, Prince Henry (there is a delicate portrait of him in Drayton’s “Polyolbion”), was not only a generous patron of the arts but a young man with a fruitful turn of humour.

For one hundred and fifty pages a pelting hail, a rack and scud of puns, alliterative anagrams, acrostics, ribaldry and mock-heroic burlesque overwhelm the pious simplicity of poor Tom. Ben Jonson leads the ball with : “Certain opening and drawing distiches to be applied as mollifying Cataplasmes to the tumors, Carnosities or difficult Pimples, appearing in the Authors Front, conflated of Stipticke and glutinous Vapours arising out of the Crudities.” An “explication,” in short, of Hole’s engraved frontispiece. Laurence Whitaker—“To the most peerlesse, poetical, prose-writer, the most transcendant, tramontane traveller, and the most single-soled, single-souled and single-shirted Observer, the Odcombian Gallobelgicus.” A French sonnet, composed in the style of Marot, compares him to Pantagruel. Drake moralizes in Welsh, Peacham “in the Utopian tongue,” Donne in four lines of mingled Latin, Greek and black-letter English, others in Gaelic, Italian and Spanish. Another addresses his poem to “Topographicall, Typographicall Thomas” and draws a parallel with Don Ulysses of

Ithaca. John Hoskins writes “Encomologicall Antipasticks” to “the only true travelling Porcupen of England.” Campion in Latin: “Itinerossimi Montis-candentissimique Peditis, Thomae Coryati . . . Encomiasticon”: William Fenton, the translator of Bandello and Guicciardini, in a language only known to himself. William Baker: “The anatomie, dissection or cutting up of that great quack-salver of words, Mr. Thomas Coryate, our British Mercurie.” And another, “upon this unmatched worke, the true hieroglyphicke of that obserватive and long-winded gentleman, Thomas Coryate.” Glareanus Vadianus begins, “Arma virumque cano.” John Chapman and Inigo Jones make rare and punster’s play with Coryat’s home: “Our Odde Author hath Comb’d the fertile pate of his knowledge” and “Odde is the combe from whence this Cocke did come.” This is not a tithe even of the titles of an antic rout of Holofernesque, Armadoan verses, in praise of “the most Axiopisticall Hodaeopory” of our gratified, if bewildered pilgrim. Can we not see a convulsed Court crowning the exultant Tom as the Tenth and most “autarkesticall” of the Worthies?

The moral? It is certainly an odd, Brobdingnagian fashion of having your joke. But, outside Falstaff, it is the only Rabelaisian form of jest that exists in the language. In their queer academic deportment these Roaring Boys of learned verse do manifest a passion for language and for literature which, behind all its faults and pedantries, is the mark and seal of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age. Even the recondite element shows a zest of pursuit into the crazier corridors of expression. To my mind it is not mere fantasy to seek an analogy between

these boisterous cocktails to the "Crudités"—and Henry James, the great modern, who, above all others, has testified most intimately to the literary devotion, the religion of literature. In the same way the prefatory poem itself is a witness to the community and brotherhood of artists and so a filial ritual to the motherhood of art. That, if I am compelled to a moral, is the text of it.

## XII

SAGO

MY DEAR X,

I am a second-hand writer, but there is nobody else to celebrate him. So here in commendation of the praise-transcending, the right-worshipful and ever-to-be-lauded, the no less grave than agile, the more spirit than animal, in praise of the quintessence of all Dogs—Good-man Sago.

In your interstellar regions dogs of course, *qua* dogs (pardon my Oxford manner), do not exist. They are bright intelligencies, emblems in fact rather than substances of caninism. So you may be glad to hear something of my dog, corporeally considered. His name is, as I told you, Sago—Honest Sago, because in something I once wrote the printer, with radiant inspiration, had metamorphosed “Iago” into that form. He is smallish (like the ginger-bread nuts at Dawlish); of a rufous or rather burnt Sienna dye with iridescent high-lights upon it; hair on the short side but of a satin texture and consistency; pert little ears; a long mouth with one lip a trifle curled in a semi-ironical estimate of his microcosm; an Elizabethan ruff round his neck; forehead frequently puckered with thought; a straight, blunt little tail, merely downy as far as the tip, when it violently ex-

foliates into a thick drooping plume of creamy hairs. In comparative repose, these hairs behave plumishly; in periods of exhilaration the tail arches over the back, the hairs execute a spontaneous parting in the middle and spreadeagle themselves stiffly at different angles to the parting. His eyes are as liquid, as luminous and sentimental as those of the most approved Joshua Reynolds spaniels; he possesses two front legs à la Chippendale and two back ones which appear to be set too far apart and to straggle behind his body. I judge him to be a cross between a Ruby spaniel and a terrier.

Sago is as comprehensively useless as beauty and as parasitic as affection. Human companionship is the alpha and omega of his existence. Joseph, the brindled medley between a bull-dog and a wolf-hound and really the embodiment of a bland, respectable and middle-aged gentleman, he treats indulgently but also tartly. He prefers him quiescent in front of the fire, to active away from it, as a cushion rather than as a comrade, so that he may slide himself down half upon his shoulder and half between his paws. He has never caught a rabbit or even a fly. He is in fact almost a vegetarian—tangerines, dates, bananas, figs, prunes, grapes, beans (preferably broad), peas, cucumber, nuts (which he cracks himself), beetroot, coal, lettuces, ginger and potatoes being to his taste as edible as meat or grape-nuts. When he barks at the *xenos* it is partly as an instinctive tribute to the conventional forms of wardenship, but partly out of an æsthetic pleasure in measuring the elaborate variety of his notes. Baritone and altissimo are equally at his command. He appears to have consciously developed this language of sound, his repertory being not only copious

but significant—designed both to make his needs and emotions coherent and intelligible to himself and to communicate them (in all their differences) to me. Boots, huge stones, paper, kettle-holders, waste-paper baskets, foot-stools, loofahs, candles, duodecimos, paint brushes, branches with leaves on them and cushions are his natural prey. Sparrows particularly exasperate him. His natural chastity dislikes them. He desires not to kill but to fluster them, and partly of course to seize the opportunity of being officious. He has been taught none of the abominations of equilibrist feats—begging on his hind legs and presenting both his hands to his foster-father of his own volition and as a ready concession to the human attitude about dogs. Being self-instructed, he begs in any position, sitting sideways perhaps for ten minutes on his rump without inconvenience and, in his observation of other objects, forgetting after a while the original purpose of his solicitation. Nor does he beg merely for loofahs nor beetroot nor for recreation with his human parent nor to attract attention to himself, nor even from vanity, but frequently just out of courtesy. He is inclined to keep late hours, being usually at his briskest from twelve to one in the morning. Like the giant to whom he has attached himself, he prefers to sleep with coverings over him, being often discovered in the morning lying beneath the sheets and the blankets in the neighbourhood of the giant's feet. So in the spasmodic intervals of rest between his multiple activities in the day-time he prefers chairs, desks, tables and the back of my neck and shoulders to the floor.

Yet as a metaphysician, and in spite of a certain hypersensitiveness, he is one of the quietists. When he is

reflecting, which I admit is with him a too self-conscious process, his countenance has that ancientest expression only to be seen on the face of a very young child. As he deliberates and I regard him, he is perfectly well aware that I know he is thinking as follows : “ Some consecutions are so intimately and evidently connexed to, or found in the premisses, that the conclusion is attained *quasi per saltum* and, without anything of ratiocinative progression, as the eye sees his object immediately, and without any previous discourse.” Being in some respects a young coxcomb, he is fond of advertising the professorial air. The total effect is occasionally curtailed by his inability to keep awake. He is not, I fear, unlike the sententious undergraduate whose conversation is a permanent inquiry of “ What do you mean by so-and-so ? ” His curiosity in the parcels that come to the door is so avid that I have to let him open them. Still, if his abnormal inquisitiveness sometimes takes embarrassing forms (as when he is anxious to know why I do not dip a fountain pen into the ink), he is the least incurious of philosophers and psychologists. He will sit for a round hour at the window inventing satirical epigrams about the passers-by (pedestrians he would call them). Indeed, he is the most affected autobiographist I have even reviewed. Even in the precise matter of food there must be a preliminary exercise in positive masculine coquetry before he will touch it. Publicity is the sole motive of his recreations. Even his temperamental demureness and ingrained fastidiousness he artificially develops. He is an artist from waking hours to the obtrusively manœuvred attitudes of slumber, preferring, for sensation’s sake, to sleep on his back, front legs folded, hind legs spread-

eagled in the air. But if his recognition of his own parts is apt to be a little theatrical, he invariably saves himself from any disesteem by the masterly delicacy, the exquisite grace in which he conveys to you his complete awareness of his own affectations. Yes, if his disposition is angelic, his love disinterested, his innocence without knowledge of sin, his soul like a celestial butterfly, his cleverness is certainly diabolical.

I was literally in a tight corner. Having rashly castled without advancing any of the three pawns in the king's neighbourhood, so as to open a window of escape for him from the back-line, I had laid open my flank to the swift onset of a covered queen, bishop or castle. The nemesis of my careless strategy overtook me. A bishop, whirling his crozier and with a frowning queen (arms akimbo) behind him, whipped off the nearest pawn. The king was forced to retreat into the extreme corner with what dignity he might. But the end was in sight. With awful celerity a squat and lowering castle bore down upon the pawn placed manfully but vainly in front of his widowed sovereign. "Mate," yapped Sago.

## XIII

### THE PSEUDO-PICTURESQUE

MY DEAR X,

In spite of your protests I am tempted to develop the theme of the decline of good reading, to try and find out who is responsible for it, what is the remedy, and what are its more obvious characteristics. No, I shall not be able to do it, but at any rate I mean to take a Curtian jump from off this airy pinnacle of epistolary light-headedness. I will even have the audacity to begin my headlong career on the hobby-horse of style.

"It is the highest degree unphilosophic," said de Quincey, defining an æsthetic canon of Wordsworth's, "to call language or diction 'the *dress* of thoughts.' . . . He would call it 'the *incarnation* of thoughts.'" That seems to me as pertinent a remark on style as you are likely to find among the myriad theories of the art of writing from the Elizabethan Puttenham to Quiller-Couch. I take it the whole difficulty of the subject is that it is impossible ever to arrive at an absolute definition of style. Wordsworth, for instance, adopted a classical style to embody a romantic inspiration; Byron, on the other hand, wrote undiluted romance with a polemical ideal of the eighteenth century in his mind. The fact is that it is futile not only to isolate style and to identify

it with manner but to uphold an abstract formula to be adjusted to all conditions, all personalities and all periods of letters.

Now a specific disease demands a specific medicine, and you cannot prescribe the one without diagnosing the other. The danger to contemporary literature lies not in the neglect but in the exploitation of prose style to serve ulterior motives and interested ends. Style is not a derelict ship ; on the contrary it has been seized, torn from its moorings, and navigated by a horde of corsairs, plundering at will. This misappropriation of style I will call (very clumsily) the cult of the pseudo-romantic or the pseudo-picturesque. It is a multiform epidemic, and imaginative literature has been no freer from it than the leading article ; the essayist, the traveller, the novelist, the biographer, the orator and the critic are as much affected by it as the sensational reporter. There are of course plenty of exceptions. All I wish to say is that it is the particular vice of this age. Each age has its own darling vice of expression. Vagueness of a certain kind is not only the effect but actually the object of this abuse of the art of writing. Precision of statement, *unless* the statement itself is susceptible to an equivocal meaning, is avoided at all costs and for the sake of a stimulus to a spurious emotional appeal. To that end this misuse of style employs every figure that will serve to keep the feelings divorced from the intellect. Pleonasm, the reduplication of selected epithets, hyperbole, exclamation, and the use of abstract generalization are some of the commoner expedients. It is curious to note what effect this sensuous treatment of style has upon the standardizing of language. The more lax and fluid, that

is to say, the sentiments embodied in expression, the more stereotyped the expression itself. For a varied choice of phrase is a delicate register of the multiple impressions of reality. But the glib, the picturesque appeal to the surface emotions perverts and artificially simplifies the nervous organism of style. The one method defines its meaning ; the other, aiming at a decorative effect rather than a meaning, creates an appeal confused indeed, but uniform and insubstantial. Hence the most remarkable feature of the pseudo-romantic—that it tends to narrow expression down to a few standard phrases and to apply them indiscriminately to every phase of emotion. As Pope says :

“ False eloquence like the prismatic glass  
Its gaudy colours spreads on ev’ry place ;  
The face of nature we no more survey,  
*All glares alike, without distinction gay.*”

So much for a few of the attributes of what for want of a better definition I have called the pseudo-picturesque style.

What are its results upon readers and writers ? The reader, his emotions disoriented and replaced by sensation through the lack of feeling’s contact with the mind, will respond to the appeal only if expressed in the manner to which he has been accustomed.

A like course has conducted the impressionist to a like goal. For impressionism, by subordinating ideas to treatment, has adulterated the artistic canon that treatment must be not only an exact but a metaphysically exact interpretation of the material. Its mannerism, its facility, its cleverness and aptitude, its casual picturesque-

ness have not only thrown into relief the less durable and severe forms of literary utterance, but have left the reader to find the needle of the essential in a haystack of incidentals.

The first defence against this prostitution of style, which I have called the pseudo-romantic, is to swing the mind back upon the object. For in this abuse of style, as in other manifestations of false art, form is separated from ideas. More, the idea completely disappears. The task, therefore, for the stylist of the future is to effect a new reconciliation, a new adjustment between these primary elements. Does this mean that a classical rather than a romantic style is what is needed? Whatever our respect for tradition we cannot possibly return, without loss of vitality, either to the utilitarian classicism of the Romans, the naïve classicism of the Middle Ages or the polite classicism of the eighteenth-century Augustans. A nation with such travail and experience behind it and with such discord in its midst as our own, must seek for some *rapport* between classicism and romanticism, flourishing if possible, simultaneously. It is a curious fact that the excess of the one is liable to produce *at the same time* an excess of the other. In the eighteenth century, for instance, the prose style of Addison, Swift, Gray and Walpole coincided not only with the disingenuous Gothic revival but with the pseudo-picturesque cult of the minor versifiers. The only difference between our own romantics and Philips' "Blenheim," Young's "Night Thoughts," and Nicholas Rowe's translation in heroic couplets of Lucan's *Pharsalia* is the difference in the use of certain specific mannerisms. In the same way the orgies of some picturesque moderns are tending to

create an effect of the same kind of diffusely grey colouration which represents an extravagant abuse of the classic method.

But this closer touch with the object need not imply bare and graceless outlines in expression. Far less should it be taken to indicate the usual preliminary to artistic expression. In sound artistic creation, indeed, the idea concentrates upon you rather than you upon the idea. It lays hold of you rather than you upon it. You are its instrument. The natural development is towards an assimilation of idea and form, resulting in a third compound. That compound I may call rhythm or synthesis, or in Sturge Moore's words, "poise." It is a compound which, unlike form and idea considered separately, is always mobile and elastic, and performs two definite functions in the art of writing. It throws that art from a particular into a universal appeal, and it preserves and registers an organic symmetry between the conception and its method of embodiment. It is only in the achievement of this synthetic unity that the classic and the romantic either in form or idea can co-exist and the personality of the writer (or in other words the originality of the thing written) can flow into all the parts of the mechanism without disturbing either their interrelation or equilibrium. "The accord of one thing with another," said Dürer, "is beautiful."

I have used the word "rhythm" in this letter not because I like it (it has a blue-stocking air) but because form is so frequently confused with technique that I had to find another word for it. For rhythm or synthesis really means, of course, imaginative form. Dr. Johnson said of a tract of Goldsmith's that it was "a foolish thing

well done." A foolish thing may be technically accomplished, but it cannot have form. You can never, on the other hand, afford to discard pure technique until you are quite sure you have got it. The difference between form and technique is on the same scale as that between knowledge and proficiency. Indeed, from the point of view of this letter, all great literature is classical, because all great literature has form. For form, in its most ample sense, means the complete fulfilment of an artistic purpose, not so much as the artist, but as God intended it. There are five essentials which are requisite to the greatest art. It must be universal (*is not recognition* the thing which a reader feels at a work of art?); it must have harmony not only in all its parts but with reality; it must have imaginative beauty (however ugly the subject-matter); it must be concentrated, and it must have tranquillity. All these things are but divisions of the same thing, and all these things a work of art will possess, provided it emerges in form.

The first four of these qualifications would I suppose be generally admitted; the fifth I have added. This seems to me to fulfil two offices—to be in the first place the condition favourable to the operative powers of the other four elements, and, in the second, to be the result, the proper effect upon us of a work of art. You may deny its presence in the most convulsive tragedies of Shakespeare, the dizziest flights of Shelley, the fieriest transports of Crashaw. Read the end of a tragedy of Shakespeare's (one of the villainies of some of the modern interpretations of Shakespeare is to cut the end out), or of one of the great Shelley and Crashaw poems, and tranquillity (with its wonderful sense of moral elevation)

surges over you like the waves of day over a troubled night. The primary condition for creating art seems to me not only "emotion recollected in tranquillity," but tranquillity to begin creation, tranquillity to contain the passion of it and tranquillity to end it.

What right have I then to complain of this modern expression I have been talking about, if it does not achieve form? Does mankind in any age achieve perfection? Who does achieve it but the saints and the great artists? Yes, but when one is conscious of a certain phase of modern art and life as not only manifesting but taking on faith unrest, dispersion, discord, and the particular and the accidental, when one regards this expression in its rule-of-thumb and hand-to-mouth aspect, then surely there can be an application of the meaning of form to life and art—always provided that "form" be never mistaken for technical expertness, which, as I suggested in my first letter, is so often the correlative of anarchy.

I mean "classical" then, not in the sense of form, but as an image in little of it. Form is an ideal which may or may not be won; the classical certainty admits of practical achievement. Take these five qualities of art I mentioned. A man may not attain the universal but he may differentiate between the accidental things of life, such as politics, business, etc., and the realities such as humanity, books, nature, etc. He may not be capable of concentrated thought, but he can devote his mind and heart to his work; he may not create beauty, but he need not confuse it with ugliness. In the same way he may know spiritual harmony and he may eschew turbulence and noise. The meaning of a classical style need not be a style well disciplined, balanced and proportioned—

making its points sharply and coherently. It means keeping in touch with the idea and meaning of the thing written about. But as applied to contemporary literature it means something else as well—a careful pilotage between disorder and punctilio. Contemporary literature (there are of course happy exceptions) takes more or less two directions. Either it devotes itself to treatment and runs away from the subject (as exemplified by the pseudo-picturesque) or it devotes itself *exclusively* and inordinately to the subject (as exemplified by the realists). I am not going to bother about realism here—I will give you a dose of it in another letter.

By " classicism," in short, I mean simply measure, measure which avoids the weakness of extravagance and insolence ; which is not so academic as to sever one from one's age, but at the same time helps one to see one's age at a wise distance ; which is I believe an antidote both to the formlessness of the age and its misuse of style, and which certainly may be fitted to the romantic inspiration. "I have heard," said Dürer, " how one of the Seven Sages of Greece taught that measure is in all things physical and moral, best." But this measure has nothing whatever to do with " *auream mediocritatem*," which I should translate—quite literally—gilded mediocrity.

And in conclusion let me quote what I think is a very fair example of a " classical " style in modern letters. It is from Dr. Richard Garnett's " Twilight of the God " :

" The King of Ayodhya possessed, beyond all princes of his age, the art of gracefully interrupting an unseasonable discourse. He slightly signed to a courtier in attendance, a scimitar flashed for a moment from its scabbard, and the head of Sorianus rolled on the pavement ; the lips murmured as though still

striving to dwell with inarticulate fondness upon the last word of hope for mankind.

It soon appeared that the principle of life was essential to the resplendence of the Purple Head. Within a few moments it had assumed so ghastly a hue that the Rajah himself was intimidated, and directed that it should be consumed with the body.

The same full moon that watched the white-robed throng busied with the rites of incineration in a grove of palms, beheld also the seven dragons contending for the body of Marcobad. But, for many a year, the maids and matrons of Rome were not weary of regarding, extolling and coveting the priceless purple tissue that glowed in the fane of Jupiter Capitolinus."

The outlines are clear, but they are not abrupt; the sentences are well co-ordinated, but full of variety; the style interprets the material exactly, but with a grace of movement of its own. As verse examples I suggest Francis Thompson's "Ode to the Dead Cardinal of Westminster" and James Thomson's "To our Ladies of Death":

"Last Thou, retirèd nun and throneless queen,  
Our Lady of Oblivion, last Thou;" etc.

Of the pseudo-picturesque I need give you no examples. Open a daily newspaper and compare its idiom (varying of course in degree) with the novels, speeches, travels, biographies, criticism, essays which resemble it in kind. They are not few.

## XIV

### THE ARTIST, THE STATE, AND THE AMATEUR

MY DEAR X,

I am afraid you found my last letter both sporadic and laborious, attributes that do not properly belong to the dashing Curtian. In this letter, I want to pique you by enforcing the astonishing paradox that a healthy nation cannot do without the arts. By arts, I do not mean only the crafts, but painting, music, sculpture, and, above all, sweet Mistress Literature. How it would benefit a Labour Leader if he knew a little literature !

You must not imagine that I am an advocate of classical austerities, by conviction. I have been merely attempting to give a definition of style which will in the first place begin a counter-offensive against the pseudo-picturesque, and, in the second, may serve as a nucleus from which future literature might once more reaffirm its proper intimacy with the national life. The evolution of style or rather the emergence of the synthetic quality out of understanding (which is not necessarily knowledge)\* is in microcosm what we have a right to expect of society.

Art, as Morris truly said, "is, and must be, either in its abundance or its barrenness, in its sincerity and hollow-

\* Those who confuse knowledge with understanding forget what happened to Alice's bulrushes.

ness, the expression of the society amongst which it exists." Precisely, in fact, what is wrong with style is wrong with society. There is no surer index of the corruption of modern England than the slovenly, garish, sentimental style (so viciously hard and prosaic if you dig to its root) paramount in the commoner fashions of contemporary writing. Let it not be forgotten therefore that the degradation of style is not only a consequence of industrial slavery but that mankind positively cannot live without feeling in one way or another towards form. Is not the tragedy of modern society proof enough of this commonplace—modern society disintegrating in the shapeless clash of discords, in its lack of any sense of coherence and equilibrium, and pawning itself to what is surely the most ironical of alliances, greed on the one hand and incompetence on the other.

The present system then must stand or fall according as it stimulates or debases the ultimate forces by which man exists—the faculty for idleness or pleasure and the faculty for energy or work. And the principle of reconstruction, unless we are to perpetuate the system in another shape, must aim towards the readjustment of an internal order in social and public life. Not external, because there again you are caught between incoherence and coercion, the besetting follies of the age. It is this reintegrating power which must occupy reformers in the future; this should be a goal for them over and beyond economic changes, political discontents and social upheavals. I used to incline towards the Guild idea of self-government more than any other, for England during the last decade has had a bitter taste of State and Government control—unchecked by any free organization out-

side of it—which she is not likely to forget. But neither a Guild nor any other system deserves to prosper unless it takes this further purpose into account. Otherwise they are mere machinery which the Guild system has given ample evidence of being. Nor do I believe that we shall ever achieve internal order or synthesis or form under a Guild or any other potential community, except by formulating the relations between art and the commonwealth. The whole question depends on the expansion or contraction of the meaning of art. If we assume that humanity in its individual or collective aims contains within itself the seed of an artistic purpose, then it is the plain obligation of all who are interested in its welfare to help the seed first to germinate, and then to be cultivated to its full flower—in other words to give it expression and finally form. If, on the other hand, humanity presents too arid a soil for these pioneers, then let us in at the gates of the City of Dreadful Night and have done with it.

But the first assumption is the more probable one. A perverted æsthetic energy is implicit even amid the chaos and dissolution of modern life and in spite of the organized efforts of vested interests to uproot it. The poorest slum-dweller indulges his taste in superfluous ornament ; the industrial drudge trims and finishes the shoddy material in the use of which he has neither interest nor pleasure. In every trade and profession there is a mass of talent—but untrained, undirected, a-synthetic and devoted purely to external and material ends. The damnable acquisitive appetite deflects and disfigures the whole thing. Even in literature the cult of the pseudo-picturesque admits the power of æsthetic execution.

But if there is a creative instinct it is certainly sprung upon and choked by the thorns. It is for that reason—that he may realize indefinite æsthetic needs—that the artist relies upon any democratic developments you will, and they, if they are going to make any difference to society, must rely upon the artist.

For what, after all, is the principle of democracy (in its proper, not its mob sense) but to divert the fruits of labour from the gratification of an economically parasitic class to the enjoyment and satisfaction of the whole community? What does that mean but, to quote Morris again, “that the true secret of happiness lies in the taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life”? This awakened interest surely implies an æsthetic and (if that interest cover both conception and fulfilment, both the selection of appropriate material and trained skill in interpreting it) points out the road to some final synthesis. To what degree again will social health and sanity abound and flourish unless an organic meaning be given to this individual impulse and it be manifested in all the busy, humming cells of national life? Such a principle may be Utopian, but a true democracy is an inn on the road to the spiritual Eldorado and Utopia itself, the logical goal of man’s genuine needs and aspirations.

Only under the influence of this conception may one dare to dogmatise upon what the public wants or about the authority of the artist in a future state. After all, true happiness is in itself an art, a delicate poise and a spontaneous equilibrium of the natural faculties. A forcible disharmony therefore (it must be forcible because the proper exercise of personality depends upon natural unity) between man’s several parts, between his intellect

and his emotions, between his sensations and his perceptions is simply a means towards unhappiness and distortion of beauty. The function, therefore, of the artist in a democracy is to reveal the possibilities of æsthetic attainment in work and of true enjoyment in leisure.

Now the whole difference between this natural intimacy of the artist with the public and the present system is this : the self-interested caterers of the public's needs to-day have not given the public what it wants, but imposed upon it for their own ends what they want. That is what I mean by an ulterior motive. Having wounded not only the desire for beauty but the faculty of apprehending it, these vested interests necessarily prescribe a regimen of ugliness and vulgarity in books, in amusements, in architecture, in every phase of civic, domestic and social life. The public sensibility to-day is sick, and little is offered it but drugs to stimulate its malady. Moreover, being out of health and so out of harmony, it wants and will have nothing but drugs. But what these vested interests want, you will say, is what the public wants. That is false, for the reason that they are identical with, and so appeal to the lowest common denominator of the public consciousness. But the taste that appeals to and expresses the highest common factor of the public's needs is just as representative and a thousand times more indispensable. In the same way a writer, however thin his talent, should mentally address his work, not to the average but an ideal reader—or shall I say a perspicuous and deeply respected friend. At present, to use a Mendelian term, the L.C.D. is dominant and the H.C.F. recessive.

Now the artist is vitally interested in reversing<sup>†</sup> the condition. Banish him out of the commonwealth and

the usurping interests of business will destroy it ; give him every scope for self-realization and the spiritual values of the arts will preserve it. Man cannot live by bread alone. If then there is to be any way out at all from the muddle and futility in which the business man has landed us, the first essential of any redemptive movement is an artistic value which, by the precept and example of actual production, will at least give the public the choice of rejecting or accepting what it lays before them. At present the public has none, since the only choice before it is in degrees of badness. A vitiation of taste ? What else can we expect ?

Here is an example, in little, of my argument. Dürer and Michael Angelo had three points in common : they were supreme artists ; they were contemporaries, and they both wrote verse. Michael Angelo wrote marmoreal sonnets ; Dürer wrote doggerel. Differences in natural genius account in part, of course, for this. But their mutual environment had something to do with it as well. Michael Angelo wrote in and for a highly cultivated and critical Italian society—who judged and appraised the imaginative strength and adequacy of form in his work. He both fashioned and was fashioned by his intellectual audience. Dürer, on the other hand, wrote for boors. He was not so fine a poet as Michael Angelo, but had he not written down to his readers he would, with his power of self-criticism, I dare vouch, not have written fustian. Indeed the absence of a traditional artistic knowledge in a public tempts the artist to begin by teaching it its alphabet.

Here I may touch briefly upon the vexed problem of the artist as preacher. The term is ambiguous, partly

because the artist is driven by hostile circumstances into revolt and criticism, partly because the dogmatic and moral element is only his by implication. Unless it is subordinate to form it will warp his artistic purpose. He has not so much to create but to develop and direct a capacity for preference already present in a rudimentary shape, not by pedagogy but by the independent example of his work and by full power to exercise it. As Coleridge says, "Great minds can and do create the taste of the age, and one of the contingent causes which warp the taste of nations and ages is, that men of genius in part yield to it, and in part are acted upon by the taste of the age." I have not contradicted Coleridge because what he means by taste is a cultivated preference. The advantage of a truly democratic system, broadly conceived on æsthetic and philosophic, as well as on economic principles, is, that the artist is working within and not outside the social structure; that he is giving expression and fulfilment to a creative passion working through all the arteries of national productiveness and so guiding that impulse into form. He is, in short, creating good taste. That is where democracy and the artist are at one. Working in co-operation, they desire to swing the whole body of society round away from acquiring things and towards producing things. They say, they ought to say in unison, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

I may make one last point. What kind of an artist does society need? There are two kinds—the amateur and the professional, and the past is full of the excellences of both. But nowadays they have come into collision, and I am inclined to think that the amateur, by getting the best of it, has driven the professional into specializa-

tion. Anarchy again has created mere technical glibness. Now by “amateur” I do not mean the opposite of the man who earns from 1d. to 1s. a line. An average popular novelist is just as much of an amateur as the veriest gosling of letters. Nor am I reflecting on him as the *parvenu* of art. I mean simply the reverse of the trained man, of the man with a background, with something behind the dressed shop-window or the geranium-glowing front garden. The amateur is simply the man who does not know his job, but makes a great point of showing that he does. He is the person who thinks he can practise an art or a craft without study of his own work on the one hand and of its relation with the creative spirit of life on the other. Thus a scientist who destroys life in order to classify and pile up facts about it is every bit as much of an amateur as the dabbler. The amateur will have nothing to do with this pregnant saying of Dürer’s :

“ It is ordained that never shall any man be able, out of his own thoughts, to make a beautiful figure, unless, by much study, he hath well stored his mind. That then is no longer to be called his own ; it is art acquired and learnt, which soweth, waxeth and beareth fruit after its kind. Thence the gathered secret treasure of the heart is manifested openly in the work and the new creature which a man created in his heart appeareth in the form of a thing.”

I need not point out what bearing this has upon artistic tradition. But that I leave to a later letter.

The amateur then practises his art and craft without any such apprenticeship. So long as he does so *in play* he does good to himself and no harm to the genuine worker. But when he begins to take his play for earnest

and himself for an artist the amateur becomes, in a critical society, ridiculous and, in an uncritical one, dangerous. The earliest amateurs on record were the builders of the Tower of Babel ; the latest—what does industrial conscription mean but compulsory incompetence—turning the whole population into *forced* amateurs, taking them away from the work they know and putting them to the work they don't ? And between them straggles a long line of cheerful incompetents gaily plying the tools that they know not how to use. The amateur, indeed, is an extremist on the one border, as the expert or specialist is on the other. For the next worst thing to not knowing your job is to know nothing beyond it ; and he was not far wrong who said that the completely educated person must know everything about something and something about everything. Especially true is it of literature that nothing in the universe is alien to it. In the eye of the amateur, a writer's stock-in-trade is a fountain pen and a pad of paper, flanked, in the ultra-conscientious, by an English dictionary. But the real artist knows how much accumulation lies about the root of even his humblest blossom, how much reading, contemplation, tradition and experience, how much wasted endeavour even, has gone to build up a very small pyramid of achievement. “ Il y a un fier dessous,” said Balzac. The amateur not only has no “ dessous,” he never perceives that one is needed.

Indeed, what the public needs is not the specialized academic nor the amateur, but the professional artist of training and conviction. He, poor man, has his work cut out, for even in the Arcadia of his imagination, he is faced by the adversary. A circle of debased values, a

triple wall of brass—or rather of neo-Byzantine coloured marble—pens him in on every side. He is there, not only to give the predatory spirit the lie, but to confront it with the creative spirit, to show the advantage of giving over taking. For whether he wish it or no, whether he choose to paint or to write about his own age or not, whether again he stand aloof from it or not (and to a certain extent, in order to get his perspective, he *must*), the aristocracy of art is the destined foe of the aristocracy of money with its thick, padded Tweedledum armour of bad taste.

## XV

### REVIEWING—THE ART AND THE TRADE

MY DEAR X,

I was once talking over the subject of my last two or three letters with a friend of mine who, now and again, paints. I am a ludicrously bad conversationalist ; in arguing a case I can no more articulate my precise meaning than a statesman. Confront me with a generalization, as cheap, as flaccid, as vulnerable as you please, so it be confidently uttered, and the particles of my mind scurry like a disturbed ant-heap. My thought stammers, which is far worse than an impediment of speech. Partly, I suppose, because when one believes vehemently in something, one is liable to watch the thought of the opposition too intently, to anticipate and be confounded (in the eagerness to convert) by the objections. If I were arrested and put on my trial for hamstringing the President of Venezuela, I should be convicted from sheer intellectual palsy in defending myself. The heat of a ratiocinative crisis seems to shrivel my mentality. Anyway, there I was, dithering on about the recognition of artistic values. "Well," said this friend with a terrible plumpness of assurance, "if you think I am going to submit my work to an academy of fogies——!" Though my head was

pulsating like a paddle-box, not one word had I to say. Which is the authentic autobiographical genesis of my previous two letters. I had to get my own back somehow. And if it were not that this accursed paralysis and ineptitude rankle as they do, I hardly believe (a) that I should have written the letters at all, or (b) that I should have made up my mind to pursue the matter indirectly into the neighbourhood of criticism.

These poor hacks and sutlers of literature are called "reviewers" nowadays, because for such fry to style themselves critics would be to plunge themselves instantly into the Dunciad of their fellows' regard. Indeed for a reviewer to write about reviewing at all is surely to remind himself of the serpent who, in the seventeenth-century printers' marks, is to be observed, in a paroxysm of despair, devouring his own tail. The last thing that the reviewer desires is to turn the inward eye upon the conditions of his trade. How he will dwindle in his own esteem ! Coleridge, who compared the activities of reviewers to those of maggots, inferior to bookworms, living on the delicious brains of genius, is, he will declare, too tolerant of him. For nowadays, he battens, not on masterpieces, not on Grays, Godwins, Goldsmiths, and Golden Treasuries, but Garvices. Whether or not, alas, he have the courage of his career and regard criticism as an honourable pursuit demanding training, knowledge and judgment rather than, as the layman regards it, as a refuge from responsibility and hard work, he will watch the over-production of indifferent fiction rather with a covetous than a censorious eye. Where others, more fortunate than he is, dream of cakes and champagne, he will build stately pleasure-domes of comfort in terms of

inflated waste-paper baskets. The more rubbish for the public, says he, the more stout and kippers for me.

“ The sundew in the boggy vale,  
The nosing badger in the hills  
Are not to me so rare a tale  
As good books and receipted bills.”

Yet it was not always thus. When I am feeling particularly humiliated I turn to the following epigram of Ben Jonson :

“ May others feare flye and traduce thy name,  
As guilty men do Magistrates : glad I,  
That wish my poemes a legitimate fame,  
Charge them, for a crown, to thy sole censure hye.  
And, but a sprig of bayes given by thee,  
Shall outlive garlands, stolne from the chast tree.”

Now I am not so much concerned with the causes of the decay of criticism as with suggestions for its possible recovery. But, as the one is the complement of the other, I must, to some extent, interpret my complaint. What, in a word, is the matter with modern criticism ? Well, the matter with criticism corresponds with what is the matter with the intelligence of the reading public and the vested interests that control that public. The *function* of the critic has, by almost insensible degrees, suffered a radical change. What in fact applies to journalism applies equally to criticism. I need not repeat the summaries of my previous letters on the subject. The decline of criticism is correlative with the decline of interest in the things of the mind. A new definition must be found

for the new attitude of the critic to his public, and of his public to him. Indifference and a craving for stimulants have spread like a frost over the mental consciousness of the public, and it is the business of the critic not to thwart that influence, but to expedite and encourage it. He is no longer in the position of a magistrate of letters, of a Platonic guardian or overseer appointed to protect the intellectual interests of the public, but rather of a middleman, whose office it is to recommend the goods that come to his hand, whatever their quality, to display their features satisfactorily, and to pass them smoothly on to their destination.

What indeed is disastrous to the reviewer is the general literary attitude towards him. What could be more shameful, more degrading to his artistic morals and self-respect than the habit, forced upon him by penury, of shuffling in and out of newspaper offices, cap in hand, like a mendicant and begging for books as though they were crusts—any wretched trifle of author's vanity the charity of editors will give him. And heaven knows that he has other difficulties enough—the advertising columns, the supremacy of topics of political and social interest dwindling his space ; the over-production of books ; the marketable value of popular authors ; the custom of promiscuous praise ; the tacit assumption that certain conditions are attached to a livelihood got by reviewing, one of them being that he must possess himself of a small apparatus of verbal shibboleth and recognizable phrase (as a workman must have certain tools), that and *nothing else* ; economic dependence (no comparatively well-to-do writer would do reviewing nowadays)—all these militate against good and honest criticism. Poor

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wretch ! My wonder is not that reviewers are so often wrong about books, but so often right.

So true it is that in literature it is not the demand that creates the supply, but the supply that creates the demand. The purveyor of literary goods merely emphasizes the futility of his customers and the reaction of their futility upon him, by adopting the principle of number rather than of selection. In such a vicious circle what is the critic but a spoke within the wheel ? Can anyone therefore wonder that the modern critic has been deprived of his ancient status and distinction in literature ; that his loss in dignity has corresponded with his being the worst-paid of all professions, and that the good-humoured and nearly justifiable contempt in which he is commonly held has resulted in the prevailing opinion that the man who has taken to criticism is the man who has failed to make a creditable living in every other job ?

I cannot illuminate my point better than by summarizing the abler, keener, more reflective and estimable contemporary opinion about reviewing. Its interest and relevance lie in the fact that it implies an intellectual apology for that change of attitude and function which, in recent years, has thrown the critic out of his seat of authority. At the outset, this attitude makes a significant differentiation between criticism and book-reviewing. The office of the reviewer is somewhere between the office of the critic and that of the reporter. What then are the qualities and attributes of this hybrid animal—the reviewer ? To put it briefly, he is there to portray a book and for no other purpose. His duty is to give, not an opinion, but a portrait of the book in question. He must not stray into the irrelevant paths of opinion. That

kind of commentator is literally opinionated. "The curse of comment," "unreasonable intolerance," the substitution for the portrait of a "rag-bag of the reviewer's own moral, political, or religious opinions," the "detestable" habit of "general remarks," and so on. I quote from a genuinely trained, fastidious and brilliant critic whose practice is vastly better than his word. Theorizing and the discussion of "abstract argument," sermonizing, in fact, are a vicious departure from the simple rules which should govern the reviewer in his occupation. To be quite fair to this very plausible exposition, I ought to say that, though the critic does not define exactly what a portraiture should be, he is careful to say that it should not be a summary of a book's contents—that summary, I may add, which often passes so insidiously into the publisher's advertisement and thence, preening its wings for still further flights, soars into the nebulous regions of hyperbole.

Now, what are the implications of this apology? It is, in the first place, to postulate your critic as a tradesman rather than an artist, to exile him from literature into "occasional" journalism. It is, in the second place, to throw the emphasis rather on his duty to the author than to the public; thirdly, to deprive him of principles, criteria, and doctrines;\* fourthly, to make the critical faculty an accidental rather than an essential qualification; fifthly, seriously to sap his individuality and independence; and lastly (an important point) to interpret him not as a professional and a lover, but as an amateur,

\* I confess that I regard the prejudice against theory as lazy, foolish and pestilent. Darwin's discovery of the law of Natural Selection was but a theory. Every fact has its theory, as every book its printer and to air the wrong one is better than none at all.

an impressionist and dilettante. The meaning with which the whole Gallic and Saxon tradition have endowed the critic has become obsolete; in deference to modern demands, he is to march down from the judge's bench into the witness-box. A very different conception, for instance, from that of Hazlitt, who, according to Bagehot, started the question as to whether it would not be well to review books which did not appear, to escape the labour of perusing print, and to save his fellows from the slow torture of tedious extracts.

Where will be the kind of reviewer indicated in the above edict when confronted by a work of imaginative vision? Or with a bad book? Is the reviewer to give a portrait of it, as with a good? Well, in a way he may—always provided that he knows exactly where he stands with it, what *kind* of a bad book it is and by what artistic tests it fails. Denunciation, unless the book is pretentious (the worst of literary vices), in bad feeling or bad taste, tends to be a juvenile exercise. Let him then give his portrait, but let him make quite sure that his reader will realize it to be an exposure. For that, the reviewer must be acquainted with the ironic method, a method which postulates this very rag-bag of principles, knowledge and traditional example, a method which cannot be employed without them. Herbert Spencer (whom, by the way, all of us wrung dry of hope, freedom, happiness and virtue by state sovereignty, ought to read nowadays for the comfort of individualism) in the best book he wrote—"Social Statics"—says finely, "Let him but duly realize the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external circumstance to itself—that *his* opinion rightly forms part of this agency—is a unit of

force constituting with other such units the general power which works out social changes—and he will then perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his *innermost convictions*, leaving it to produce what effect it may. It is not for nothing that he has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnances to others. He, with all his capacities and desires and beliefs, is not an accident but a product of the time. Influences that have acted upon preceding generations ; influences that have been brought to bear upon him ; the education that disciplined his childhood, together with the circumstances in which he has since lived, have conspired to make him what he is. And the result thus wrought out in him has a purpose.” It will not do any harm to literature, surely, to substitute the critic for “ him.”

It seems that what the heretics boggle at is that word “opinion,” tending to confuse it with the application of abstract principles. A passage in the fifth book of Plato’s “Republic” is so pertinent, both as light upon their objections and as a positive assertion of the critic’s proper ministry, that I am tempted to quote it. It bears upon the famous distinction between a genuine and counterfeit philosopher :

“ ‘ I suppose that those who love seeing and hearing, admire beautiful sounds and colours and forms and all artistic products into which these enter ; but the nature of beauty in itself their understanding is unable to behold and embrace.’ ‘ Yes, it certainly is as you say.’ ‘ But those who are capable of reaching to the independent contemplation of abstract beauty will be rare exceptions, will they not ? ’ ‘ They will indeed.’ ‘ Therefore, if a man recognizes the existence of beautiful things, but disbelieves in abstract beauty, and has not the power to follow

should another lead the way to the knowledge of it, is his life, think you, a dreaming or a waking one? Just consider. Is it not dreaming when a person, whether asleep or awake, mistakes the likeness of anything for the real thing of which it is a likeness? 'I confess I should say that a person in that predicament was dreaming.' 'Take, again, the opposite case, of one who acknowledges an abstract beauty, and has the power to discern both this essence and the objects into which it enters, and who never mistakes such objects for the essence, nor the essence for the objects; does such a person, think you, live a dreaming or a waking life?' 'A waking life, undoubtedly.' 'If so shall we not be right in calling the mental process of the latter knowledge, because he really knows; and that of the former opinion, because he merely opines?'"

Upon such a conception, I am inclined to pin my faith, and declare that what is right for Peter is also right for Paul. Criticism, indeed, is the art of discovering first principles, and the critics, to be adequately equipped, must formulate behind shifting and individual expressions of art, a centripetal, unifying theory, an abiding generalization. The critic must not be a huge and cavernous pot for all manner of literary fare. He will, and ought to form certain crystallizations which, though he will put Crashaw and Pope (who imitated him without acknowledgment and after exposing him) on a certain level, will not only prefer Crashaw to Pope, or Pope to Crashaw, without any doubt of the matter, but know why he does. An incompetent reviewer is one who adapts his critical apparatus to his book; a competent reviewer is one who brings to the study of every book, a genuine conviction, a revealing message, and an elucidated doctrine. The one sees a separate phenomenon in every book;

the other sees every book as part of the phenomena of books.

From this point of view, every critique is a confession of faith and the exposition of a philosophy. Such a critic will not cut his cloth to his book, but submit the book to the jurisdiction of first-hand principles. If he is wrong, I would still assert that by the possession of critical "opinions" and preoccupations, he is less remote from the truth and from the wise exercise of his craft than the critic in the possession of none. Just as religious, moral and æsthetic beliefs make up a critical personality, so the idea of a book cannot be separated from its style and construction. For, according to the ratio of a man's convictions and belief in his work, will be his capacity to do that work properly. Training and conviction are indispensable to a critic, and indeed, no bad solvents for the complexities of modern life in general. The only point where compromise in such tenets—arbitrary tenets if you will—is at all permissible, is in the method of treatment. Virulence, no less than effusiveness, impairs the artistic poise of the critic. In the survey of books there is room for the expository catalogue; there always has been and always ought to be for the genuine critic; but there is none for the intermediate reviewer. For one thing, having nothing of his own to say, he is inevitably unreadable; true artistic conviction, on the other hand, carries its own interest and validity. The knowledgeable critic is, of course, a nuisance to editors and publishers; is that a sufficient reason to abolish him?

I acknowledge that the remedy I suggest is a counsel of perfection, which is always regarded as so impracticable and is the only thing worth living for. The critic should

look upon himself—his public and his editors should look upon him, as an artist. Under the present system, I doubt the public and the editors. But at any rate, let the critic do the worthiest and the best for himself he can. Let him not be ashamed both to ransack the past and to speculate upon the future, to combine practical experience with general ideas, to know a thing and see what it means. For he has four duties which he cannot ignore. He must see his age from a distance and try to form and express a definite conception of it ; the literatures both of the present and the past are to some extent in his hands for him to stimulate the public with the one and to remind it of the other ; he has not only to guard the public taste from shams but, in so far as lies in his power, to help to form it ; and lastly and most important of all, he must cultivate his sense of humanity. If I seem to be claiming too much for reviewing, reviewers, and public (though surely the guild or community of critics should be proud of one another), let me quote Ben Jonson :

“ It is a false quarrel against Nature, that she helps understanding but in a few, when the most part of mankind are inclined by her thither if they would take the pains ; no less than birds to fly, horses to run, etc., which, if they lose it, is through their own sluggishness, and by that means they become her prodigies, not her children.”

## XVI

### A LITERARY BAEDEKER

MY DEAR X,

If you think that, as a result of these last few rambling papers, I am going to explode a theory of education upon you, you have mistaken the aim and meaning of these letters. They are what a reviewer might call "bric-à-brac" or "olla podrida," and there I leave them. In fact, having little or no knowledge about it, I have no theory of education to expound. If you will pin me down to a declaration, my dogma amounts to—more literature; if you will have me schedule and sub-schedule this generalization in the manner of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," I would say—more English literature. If you would dissect me into further particles, I would add that English literature does not begin in 1700. If you would chop me up into small pieces, I would say that the study of literature does not consist in knowing who wrote "Agincourt, Agincourt!" but that literature is a vision of the best of life or it is worthless.

But I will be compromised no further. The University of Oxbridge (as our novelists will have it) has, as you know, made a tentative excursion of late years in this direction. But the authorities have so loaded the dear maid with chains, that she can only crawl on her hands

and knees. I turn to a book of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (that worthy and truly humanistic professor of Camford) as an illustration. It is called "The Art of Writing," and is so good that I prefer to leave this letter partly in his abler hands.

At the said Oxbridge, six years ago at any rate, the distinction due to a student of literature was awarded to him at the end of his course, not even according to his capacity in translating Kentish charters of the ninth century, but solely to his proficiency in expounding the mysteries of Umlaut and its etymological fellows. The theory behind this pedantic contempt of letters was, Sir Arthur thinks, a survival of the old ecclesiastical hatred of knowledge in the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages in which St. Gregory could utter this complacent sentiment : "*Quoniam non cognovi literaturam, introibo in potentias Domini !*" Likely enough, but the theory in aggressive possession six years ago was that the study of literature being too *easy* an exercise for the cultivation of the mind, a mental gymnastic *qua* gymnastic was necessary as a counterpoise—as though a knowledge of vowel-changes was any more of a gymnastic than accurate statistics of the number of matches, with their ends joined together, which would stretch from Westminster Abbey to St. Paul's Cathedral.

But to return to letters. One obvious suggestion I make to further education would be to encourage all young men from the age of twelve to twenty to write *not* Latin but English verse. Not with a view to publication (Apollo forbid) but as a training in the morals, manners, metaphysics, and mathematics of language. Not even as an initiation to the knighthood of poetry

but (unless the pupil be a poet in embryo) to learn how to write *prose*.

Here again I lean upon Sir Arthur's manly book. A good deal of his space is occupied with the difference between verse and prose and the "capital difficulties" which each medium has to overcome. Verse, he says, has an older ancestry than prose, primarily because it is more memorable and so less reliant upon the printed text. For verse, as Sir Arthur in his analysis of poetic inversion, stress, emphasis, repetition, and metrical dependence, cannot but acknowledge, is more liable to extrinsic arrangements of words than prose. Verse, he says, is easier to write than prose, if you care to leave out the emotion which makes it characteristic and worth while. To say this is almost to agree that prose is more difficult as being a more complex instrument of expression. If you leave out the emotion you are bound to write bad verse but not bad prose, because prose is not to the same extent as verse the handmaid of feeling.

It is in this particular that I have one solitary little bone to pick with the author. The capital difficulty of verse, he observes, is in saying ordinary things; of prose in saying extraordinary things. As instances of the triumph of verse over this difficulty, he illustrates Homer's supreme ease in evading, heightening, or transforming the bald, flat intervals of the commonplace which are bound to occur in an epic, and the achievement of the committee of forty-seven who, by the Authorized Version, actually improved in point of range, sublimity, and magnificence of diction, upon the noble work of Coverdale, Tyndale, and Wiclif. But there is an obscurity in the phrase "capital difficulty." Does Sir Arthur mean that

extraordinary speech being natural to prose, its difficulty is to say the ordinary things, or does he mean simply that prose has to struggle with its legitimate material—extraordinary things? At any rate I feel that the difficulty of verse is to say extraordinary things in a way palatable to the æsthetic sense, and of prose to say the ordinary things. Glance at the school of contemporary realistic poetry which is so intent upon expressing itself in average speech. Its undress kind of language (speech, as it were, in a dressing-gown) falls away into a looseness and waste that the widest and most generous canons of art cannot admit. Hardy, of course, uses something of the same method, but hardly ever without a dramatic fullness, a sharpness of effect, and a philosophy behind it to justify it. Whereas these realistic poets cannot forbear from heavily underlining their narrative, padding it out by refrain and repetition, and indeed treating their material as if there were no such thing as harmony, condensation and suggestion in narrative and dramatic poetry. It copies its subject out without transforming it—with without economy, without beauty, and without the poetic vision. It puts the poetic speech into corduroys and a cloth cap. It is as Dr. Johnson said of Grey, “To be dull in a new way.” It is dowdy—an inevitable but false reaction against the vertigo of the pseudo-picturesque. But prose, directly it begins to climb the mountain side, comes upon the plateau of the purple patch. It is right that it should be so; prose, with its looser structure, its more extensive area of rhythms, has a better chance of preserving the ordinary from the commonplace than verse. It may be difficult to write like Sir Thomas Browne, but it is still more so, I venture, to write like Swift. I doubt if verse

on the other hand (being the language of vision) ought to say ordinary things at all; it ought at any rate to transfigure them (unlike the later and ecclesiastical Wordsworth) into the extraordinary.

Sir Arthur refers of course to style, but you have, I am sure, had enough of that. I only suggest that if the young idea cares for nothing but shooting its personality into the page, it should be caned or fined far more rigorously than if, at school, it had failed to attend a football match, or, at the university, had been tracked to a public-house. Style is not an external ornament, but the embodiment of a synthetic character, as well as of an intellectual or moral impulse.

As for a generic principle on which the schoolmaster or professor is to work, I would beg him to teach his charges in the first place to think, in the second to think clearly. O beautiful land of Cokaine, where all the citizens have allied themselves to that glorious aim! O twittering Tophet of Fleet Street, Parliament, Law Courts, Municipalities and Officialism, which torment themselves to escape it! Sir Arthur's chapter on "Jargon" ought to be a Mene Tekel Upharsin to every sprouting writer. He makes a proper distinction between jargon and journalese, defining the latter as painting the lily and the former, begotten of caution out of indolence, as walking circumspectly round the target and then congratulating itself that it has hit it. Among other vices, it uses a storage of meaningless words, such as "case," "character," "condition," "degree" (as I myself am so liable to do), and so on. For an illustration he gives half a dozen lines of a statement by Lloyd George, in which the word "character" is used in four different senses.

Let me, stimulated by my pleasure and instruction in reading this lecture, and following the example of our author, turn a passage of fine prose into modern jargon. Take the last few lines of Izaak Walton's "Life of Donne," a passage supreme in English literature for its emotional reticence, its simple dignity, and its power of condensing whole elegies into a few words :

" He was earnest and unwearied in the search of knowledge, with which his vigorous soul is now satisfied, and employed in a continual praise of that God that first breathed it into his active body : that body, which once was a Temple of the Holy Ghost, and is now become a small quantity of Christian dust :

" But I shall see it reanimated."

Now for our jargonist :

" The late divine, now so lamentably deceased, conducted, during a life of considerable eminence, a zealous and indefatigable investigation into the mysteries of knowledge, in the unflagging pursuit of which his incessant activities—activities of mind, body, and estate admirably co-ordinated—have been ultimately consummated by the mystery of death. But death, it would seem, is the portal of infinitude, and the erudite doctor may be said to only have interrupted his untiring quest in order that it might be reverently associated with a more aetherial order—an order, it should be added, which, appropriately enough, inaugurated that quest at its very inception. His corporeal frame, in short, was, throughout a highly distinguished career, impregnated with the divine afflatus, and now, such are the mutabilities of this evanescent and mundane existence, is, by way of a graphic illustration, gathered unto a mere handful of venerable dust and a little ashes.

" Moreover, it can hardly be denied that, whatever the view-

point of our readers, whatever the fluctuating conditions and development of belief; whatever, again, the multiplicity of divergent creeds, it would be positively impious to make the suggestion that that dust, irrevocably materialized as it would seem to apparently be to a superficial aspect, will, at some future date unspecified (and by the interposition of the divine ministration), finally achieve the culmination of a glorious resurrection."

After all, surely the whole business of education is not facts, but the meaning of facts, not words, but the meaning of words—not merely learning things, but feeling and seeing them—the education of taste. For the study of the arts, the use of tradition, and the acquirement of taste, not only make headway against ignorance and stupidity, which if not worse do more harm than all the sins in the Decalogue. They are an infallible aid to discriminate between good and evil.

## XVII

### OLD BOOKS

MY DEAR X,

“Chats on old books”—I suppose that is what I am coming to. Not being one of those masterly *ingénus* in letters who can do without reading, a library becomes a calf helmet against the paper-shrapnel of the moderns. A man who writes very modern books once informed me that the only reputable way to read a book was to tear out the part you wanted and get into a railway carriage with it. How then, I exclaimed with exquisite courtesy, is posterity going to read you? Let me boldly declare with Hazlitt, “I do not altogether think the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two.” To collect books to form libraries, that is to say, is not the eccentricity of atrophied beings who have dropped falteringly out of the struggle for Real Life; it may even be not only a friendliness, an amenity, a funeral rite to the dead, a way of acquiring knowledge and enjoying beauty to oneself, but a positive social service. Then again, if one desires a library of books rather than a mass of printed leaves, garbed in neat suits of cloth, like a crocodile of small boys in Etons, there is no alternative but to buy old as well as new books. So I bought and

buy old books (there is, of course, a difference between old and first editions) when I can pocket a few shillings by selling the bad new ones. What says Drummond, who had a most judicious library?—"As good husbandmen plant trees in their times, of which the after-age may reap the fruit, so should we; and what antiquity hath done for us that should we do for posterity, so that letters and learning may not decay but ever flourish to the honour of God, the public utility and the conservation of human society."

There are of course as many kinds of book-hunters as there are kinds of temperament. There are so many angles from which to look at the thing—preferences, antipathies, prejudices, loves and hatreds are as noisy a set of imps in the book-buyer as in normal humanity. For a library is, and should be, only the expression of its owner's personality.\* On the whole, there are four kinds of purchasers. First, the moneyed collector, who writes a cheque for his mistress's binding and takes no more toll of her charms. He is a kind of Sennacherib, invading the pastoral meads of literature with his cohorts of gleaming sovereigns. An acquaintance of mine (friend would be too presumptuous) once walked into a bookshop and, with awful equanimity, bought a first edition of the "Hesperides" for eighty-six pounds. He would only be a half-way house between me and the god out of the machine, who, a mere book-hog, sends prices dashing up

\* True, I have seen one or two grotesque and crotchety attempts at personality. The Broadley collection was one of them. With its Napoleana, its abominable "grangerising," its accumulation of books about freaks and dwarfs, and people with thirteen toes ("Books on Adiposity" was one of the sub-divisions), the books were a phantasmagoria of prodigies and dullards. Here was a kind of librarial personality twisted and externatised, but very far from being personable.

precipices, and to whom a first folio Shakespeare is merely one stone in the pyramid. The library, collected by such a man, is no more than a transferred bookseller's or auction-room library. It is to books what a landowner's private estate is to nature—a cold, impersonal, ostentatious, childish toy, a calf idol to vanity and a cheque-book. Besides this kind of collector is only an abstraction ; he has not even the initiative to telephone to his agent from his drawing-room. His agent telephones to him. He has nothing like the justification of Richard de Bury, who, out of the passion and excess of his regard for books, said, "No dearness of price should hinder a man from the buying of books." Nor of Plato and Aristotle, who bought the works of Philolaus the Pythagorean for 10,000 denarii (£300) and Speusippus for 72,000. But he is the sort of man who would put all the volumes of *Punch*, bound in straight-grained olive crushed levant morocco extra, with blind stamped antique ornaments gilt-edged, line-tooled, inside dentelles, blue fly-leaves, silk end-papers, beside Jasper Mayne's folio translation of Lucian. So much for Sir Biblicure Mammon.

Next, his anti-climax, the book-buyer who cares exclusively for the inside of a book, for literary values in the nude or in a thin drapery of sixpenny paper cover. It would be hypocrisy to cast the stone at so estimable a person. My objection to him is on the ascetic count. He is a Calvinist among book-lovers, one of those rare extremists who can entirely dispense with externals. But his fetish of cheapness is often his undoing. There are some books which, with a little time and trouble, may be obtained more cheaply in a worthy old edition than in a modern reprint. There are others (such as

Lyte's, Parkinson's, or Gerarde's herbals, Hakewill's "Apologie," Fulke Greville's works, some of Defoe's and Christopher Smart's works, many of the plays in Dodsley's collection, etc.) which, having never been reprinted at all, he will never read. I should not like to choose between a tin tabernacle full of holiness within and a cathedral stuffed with ungodliness.

Thirdly, the rider of hobby-horses, who will have nothing but his own foible. He is anathema to the catholic collector, whose extent of literary appreciation, provided it be literary, is "broad as ten thousand beeves of pasture." At the beginning of his career, he has whole continents of choice on which to pitch—yellow-backs, book-plates, title-pages, woodcuts, colophons, Aldines, Baskervilles, Plantins, Frobens, black-letter books, "Smoke-Room booklets," scrap-albums, herbals, old Cookery Books, emblems, Hebrew, Hexaglot, or Hieroglyphic Bibles—what you will. But in the end he must abide by his selection and pursue his Grail, even if he have to traverse whole oyster-beds of book-shops to find a single pearl. It would make but little difference to him whether he was living under that notorious King of China, who, as reported by Sir William Temple, "ordered all books to be burnt, except those of Physick and Agriculture." He would choose Physick or Agriculture.

Lastly, the industrious idealist. The human contact is what he really seeks. He eschews, for instance, a library like the Huth, the backs of which in a sale-room remind one in their ceremonious magnificence of walking down a street of gorgeous palaces. Oh ! for an honest inn, or even a villa, you sigh. The Huth is, or rather was, the possession of wealthy bankers. Exactly. So our

bibliophile tries to avoid the icy feel of money ; he desires companions, not a set of literary silver on the side-board. So, equipped with flat pockets, a respirator, an electric torch and a pair of gardening gloves, he fronts the Odyssean main. Nor will his enterprise be unrewarded. Happily for him, modern England is no purist in literary taste. The prices of old china, pictures, and furniture exceeding those of all but the choicest and rarest books, a hundredfold, the transcendental carrot of picking up a priceless epic for a song, will be always dangling in front of his nose. His hope is outlandish districts, where the foot of orthodox collector has never trod, old stock which has not been overhauled in the auction-rooms, and a bookseller who does not know his business. Forth goes our crusader, like the book-hunting Carmelites of old, aiming "to purchase inestimable books with mud and sand," seeking drab book-shops "more aromatic than stores of spicery," "academic meads shaken by the tramp of scholars," groping among the *disjecta membra* of Latin divines and jurists to reveal the genuine book in places where, by his means, "volumes that had hidden in dark places are bathed in the ray of unwonted light," where "volumes that had slumbered through long ages in their tombs wake up and are astonished." For such an one, the cupboard will never be really bare. Incunabula, the most elect foreign books, Elizabethans, Jacobeans, and Carolines, unless defective, or overlooked by the bookseller, or in latish editions, are really beyond his reach, ringed round by a girdle of gleaming sovereigns.

His actual achievement will be not to build up a library, but lay its foundations. The pyramid gets thinner

towards its apex and the book-hunter more fastidious, when his breakfast appetite is satisfied. So when he is mewing his first fine careless mighty youth, he will, as Lamb said, "have no repugnances. Shaftesbury must not be too genteel for him, nor '*Jonathan Wild*' (I should think not—the finest satire on picaresque realism in the world) too low for him." He specializes as occasion warrants. The difference between him and the inflexible specialist is analogous with Dryden's distinction between moral philosophy and history, "which rather allures than forces us to virtue." "There is nothing of the tyrant in example; but it gently glides into us and is easy and pleasant in its passage." So I leave him, blithest of vagrants, tottering under his burdens from shop to shop, the sleeves of his coat besmeared with candle-grease from delving in cellars, his countenance bepocked with dust, string cutting runnels in his hands, muttering to himself the apothegm of Alphonsus of Aragon: "Among so many things as are by men possessed or pursued, in the course of their lives, all the rest are Bawbles, beside Old Wood to burn, Old Wine to drink, Old Friends to converse with, and Old Books to read."

Returning home at eve, he mourns not that day so soon has glided by, but opening his Burton (Part 2, Sect. 2, number 4) he reads as follows: "—such sweet content there is in study. *King James* 1605, when he came to see our University of Oxford, and amongst other Edifices, now went to view that famous library, renued by Sir *Thomas Bodley*, in imitation of *Alexander*, at his departure broke out into that noble speech, If I were not a King, I would be a University Man. *And if it were so that I must be a Prisoner, if I might have my wish, I would desire to*

*have no other Prison than that Library, and to be chained together with so many good Authors.* So sweet is the delight of study, the more learning they have (as he that hath a dropsie the more hee drinks the thirstier he is) the more they covet to learne, and the last day is *prioris discipulus*; harsh at first learning is, *radices amarae*, but *fructus dulces*, according to that of *Isocrates*, pleasant at first, the longer they live, the more they are enamoured with the Muses. Heinsius, the keeper of that Library at Leiden in Holland, was mewed up in it all the yeare long, and that which to thy thinking should have bred a loathing, caused in him a greater liking. *I no sooner (saith he) come into the Library, but I bolt the doore to me excluding lust, ambition, avarice, and all such vices, whose nurse is idlenessse, the mother of Ignorance and Melancholy herselfe, and in the very lap of Eternity, amongst so many divine soules, I take my seat, with so lofty a spirit and sweet content, that I pitty all our great ones, and rich men that know not this happinessse.* I am not ignorant in the meane time (notwithstanding this which I have said) how barbarously and basely for the most part our Tuder gentry esteeme of libraries and bookees, how they neglect and contemne so great a treasure, so inestimable a benefit, as Aesop's Cocke did the Jewell he found in the dunghill: and all through error, ignorance, and want of education."

The truth is, the day of bargains is over. Not because people are more acquainted with books than they were. Rather, being less so, they have left the field to the expert. The advent of American dealers into the English market has both raised and standardized prices. Rarities, too, have been pretty well all harvested into museums and big private libraries. Why, in Lamb's day, an extravagant

sum for Shakespeare's "Poems" (1640) was five guineas. To-day it is nearer three thousand. The Tudor and early Elizabethan poets have practically disappeared from public sources. It is almost a disturbance of natural forces for an early Abraham Fleming, or Fraunce, a Churchyard, a Barnaby Googe, a Whetstone, a Gascoigne, a Turberville, a Campion, to be put up even at the most fashionable sales, unless they be prose translations. Surrey and Wyatt have permanently gone; even so late a poet as Vaughan is practically unobtainable. Books like the first edition of Florio's Montaigne (there were three folio editions) fetch anything up to seventy pounds, if perfect copies. The books in a bibliography called "Anglo-Poetica," an invaluable catalogue of early English poetry, published in 1805, were sold, at a swoop, I believe, for seven thousand pounds—a price which set heads wagging in those days. In a modern sale-room they might reach half a million. These monstrous sums are of course partly conditioned by the passage of time, by limited editions and so forth. But they are also grossly inflated and artificial.

I am wrong. The bargain still survives, but it has been transferred from the book-lover to the bookseller. With this difference—that the latter's transactions, being all bargains, cease to be bargains. In other words the booksellers have organized the bargain. At Sotheby's, for instance, the Charing Cross Road "ring" operates, buys all but the first-class books which fetch the large prices cheaply through its members not bidding against each other, puts them up again privately among themselves, adds its fifty or a hundred per cent profit, and sells the result to customers. In two contemporaneous cata-

logues of a London and a provincial bookseller (who would be outside the ring) I saw two copies of Barclay's "Ship of Fools," alike in every particular, priced in the one case at forty pounds, in the other at twenty-five. For the real interest and meaning of books have become so initiated that you cannot imagine the poor things ever had anything to do with literature. The traffic in them has become as inhuman and impersonal as the whole system of commerce to which it is allied. Nor is this just the plaint of the indigent book-lover. It is a problem of education as important in its way as that of militarizing the country's schools. The care, the understanding, the appreciation of books should be as free to the rational and reflective of mankind as the running brooks.

O huckstering generation of booksellers, how long shall we suffer you ? How often in the place of barter have I seen you, snuffling and rooting over your prey like jackals ! Round the long green table you sit, pawing and fumbling the sacred relics, like apostate, butter-slammimg grocers. The auctioneer pipes to you, and the guineas come tumbling from your mouths, like frogs from the Princess in the fairy-story, in a sinister dance of covetous sound. Are there none among you reverent stewards of the ancient treasures committed to your charge—O dragons that guard the golden apples and traffic them for a too ample consideration ? It is an old tale that you will set traps for the unwary and sell him imperfect books as perfect, common books as "excessively rare" ; that you will make facsimiles of first-edition title-pages and insert them into second-edition books ; that you will tear a portrait out of a book and sell it for double the price of the book ; that you will forge autographs and signatures ;

that you will tear a book limb from limb rather than let your rival have the benefit of it ; that you will advertise under the heading of “*Facetiæ*” books of bawdiness and amorous intrigue. Is it not so, cozening coney-catchers ? At times, indeed, you are caught in your own dull-witted guile, O doddypoles ! A bookseller once placed in his catalogue under “*Facetiæ*” Rowe’s translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a miracle of dullness ! My theory is that Master Bookseller thought Pharsalus a derivative of phallus. Little wonder that the exceptions (and I know a few) are gluttons for righteousness.

The psychology of the out-of-the-way bookseller is, as a rule, little different—of a ruder cunning, vulpine but with a snub-nose. His shifts and expedients in fixing prices are as unstable as water. Ignorant of the values of his stock, he will as soon charge you a price preposterously above a fair return as preposterously below it. If he charges you a shilling for a book worth ten, you may be sure he thinks it worth sixpence. A friend of mine, who goes seeking, accompanied by the spirits of the authors he has bought—endowing him with a ghostly faculty for discovery and whose nose is consequently so aquiline that it will sniff out a bargain through fat circumvallations of dust—was once a-rummaging when two Tudor black-letter books of extreme rarity, and worth perhaps ten pounds apiece, fell on his head. He approached the bookseller with something of the discomfort of Achilles seized by the hair by the goddess—voice indifferently controlled, hands and knees quavering, and his whole constitution rent with the effort at unconcern. The bookseller, seeing such “ragged veterans,” covertly plumed himself as he charged a florin for the two.

Did you imagine, dear X, that in describing the ideal bibliophile, I was indulging an autobiographical vanity? Not so, I am far too haphazard and inconsistent. I buy very few books nowadays, and principally an occasional cheap one at an auction. You see I have to sell 'em again. The first time I attended a sale, a Prayer Book of Henry VIII had mounted to five hundred and sixty pounds. In a moment of sublime self-forgetfulness, rapt in a sense of Oriental lavishness, delirious with the tense counterplay of barter, I roundly remarked "six hundred." The world suddenly swung out of its planetary course and was resolved to ashes. Breasting a myriad hot and whirling atoms, I heard the voice of the auctioneer "too late."

There too I sit and listen to things like this: "Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis. Richly Illuminated Manuscript, written in bold Gothic letters on stout vellum, long lines, 14 to a full page; Calendar in gold, red and blue, red rubrics, every page surrounded with an elegant border of spiked ivy leaves interspersed with grotesques; 24 small circular miniatures in the Calendar of the Signs of the Zodiac and Occupations of the Month; 15 finely painted and richly illuminated large square and arched miniatures, mostly on diapered ground; surrounded by rich and deep borders of spiked ivy leaves in scrolls, interspersed with figures of birds, grotesques, angels with musical instruments, etc., with rich inner decorated borders connected with a large decorated initial, several hundred smaller initials and textual decorations; original sides of a contemporary Lyonese calf binding, covered with gilt tooled series of fleur-de-lis and corner ornaments with oval devices of the Annunciation and

Crucifixion in centres (4to Saec : XV)." I dare to hold this Bower of Acrisia, this pictured Avalon, this monkish El Dorado, this Temptation of St. Anthony, this Bird of Paradise, this Phœnix from the ashes of the past, this Beatitude—in the palm of my hand. The Commonplace Book of the angels !

## XVIII

### MORE OLD BOOKS

MY DEAR X,

Of course one's ambitions invariably vault over one's philosophy and means. One of the achievements which make me feel crudely bombastic is the fact that my books are still self-supporting—that I have not spent on them one penny over and beyond receipts from selling books, that, in fact, I am still some fourteen pounds to the good. But that process is on its last legs. I am becoming finikin, exclusive and aristocratic. I have become the very specialist whom my last letter's airy catholicity disdained. It was inevitable, unless one is to degenerate into a smatterer in oddments of a thousand different kinds of books. The sprawling, heterogeneous, multitudinous collection of our grandfathers, for instance, has been whittled down to the more correct and formal completeness of their children. But this economy, this habit of choiceness, is not necessarily a loss; it is sentimental to lament a collection of books because of its loss of fat. We do not disdain Blake's "The Lily" because it is only four lines long. The personality of a library, too, must be cut to the small one of its owner. Thus he will embrace and absorb it, so that it is almost as much a

portion of his living spirit as his hand that takes a particle of it from the shelf and his eye that voyages its pages. Besides, there is a limit to shelf-room, and the best modern books both in equipment and subject one can get must obviously have plenty of elbow room.

There is too the quantitative element. A book-lover is not a newspaper proprietor, feeding the furnace of war with young lives. For the former, the thin flame rising from the antique, sacrificial altar is enough. I think, I say I *think* I should be permanently without appetite, had I one thousand five hundred books ; I should have said two thousand, if I had not realized that humans living in the teens of the twentieth century have little chance of crossing the frontiers of the fifties. Would that I might grow old to read good books and still be young enough to enjoy them. Even when I indulge myself with reflections upon a library of a sifted and discriminated quality, the savage comes sometimes climbing out of my kidneys (where the amenities of books should always keep him prisoned), cries "of the making of books there is no end," and dances in barbaric exultation among the smouldering ashes of all my books. Normally, my books, ranged round the room like the wall of the enclosed garden of the Romant de la Rose, are a shield against a pitchy, clamorous outside, filled with the heart-agonizing cries of the paper-boys—the tin trumpets of the Doom. Thus—*fidei defensores*—they keep their vigilant watch, like a handful of Christian knights against the hosts of the Paynim.

So it is that selection, as in art, plays the tyrant. Any-way there are limits to placing one's neck beneath its heels.

Have you catalogues among the Intelligences, my dear X? They are awful revelations of the eccentricities of the book-collector. I took up a catalogue by hazard the other day and this "item" was written upon the third page I turned : "*Swinburne* (Algernon C.). Unpublished Verses : 'As the refluent sea-weed moves in the languid exuberant stream' 2 ll.! Privately Printed 1866." Conjure to yourself the notion of collecting treatises on shorthand (which fetch skiey prices); fancy the "rare blank leaf" of the first edition of Donne's poems (1633) adding three pounds to its price; imagine paying five pounds for a dollish little landscape painted on the "fore-edge" of a book's leaves—such collectors no doubt follow the precedent of a famous Dean of Canterbury, who placed all the books of his library with their fore-edges outwards; conceive my getting the fourth folio edition of North's "*Plutarch*" (1612) for eight-and-sixpence at a sale, because the leaf of the "errata" was missing.

I acknowledge there is a good deal to be said for the pedantry of perfection. Though I plume myself upon not being a victim to it, I confess to the pleasure which little technicalities give me. I like an old book to be clean and well-knit, to have its binding the original one and well preserved, and the impression of its portrait or engraved title, if there be one, to be strong, firm, and black. And, if a book must be defective, I prefer it to be in the middle, rather than in the end or beginning—partly because it is easier to "make-up" subsequently in that state and partly because it is less ragged, pinchbeck, and beggarly thus. I would go further. I like to see the pages of an old book well margined. It gives a

frame to the type. That does not commit me to “fine tall copies,” “uncut copies,” or “large paper copies” and fantastic inaccessibilities of that kind. I am sure I should agree with Dr. Johnson’s remark about Garrick’s library, that his books were “dandified.”

Autographs too, *qua* autographs, catch me neither warmed nor dispursed. I possess only a few and they are accidents. One of them is Stephen Duck’s in Casubon’s translation of Marcus Aurelius (1686). Hardly a web-foot on the sands of time! Another is John Selden’s in Drayton’s “Polyolbion” (1612), that noble book of England’s country-side, with its allegorical maps of expansive Amazons bearing steeples on their heads, torsos of maidens addressing the reader with gestures of self-admiration from the coils of rivers, and rustic-coated shepherds perched on little mounds; with its delicate portrait of Prince Henry balancing a spear and its engraved title, depicting a plump, matronly impersonation of England, her mantle embroidered with trees, mountain-ranges, towns, and sheaves of corn. But Selden annotated the “Polyolbion” anonymously, and I am convinced that a pious reader notified the fact by writing the signature himself. What matter? A third is Lionel Johnson’s in a third edition of the witty Bishop Corbet’s “Poems” (1672), and a fourth, Robert Bridges’ and Andrew Lang’s in the 1627 edition of Drayton’s “Poems.” They are only to be remarked as an example that three at least of our modern men-of-letters have left a testimony of their feeling for the old poets.

To my mind, the fact that a book with Ben Jonson’s inscription recently fetched four hundred pounds at a

sale commits us bookish folk to the charge of sheer nin-compoopry. Neither are my standards demoralized by the possession of many books without portraits, "preliminaries," title-pages, and portions of the text. Out upon it—were they not thus a little lower than the angels or archangels a little damaged, I should never have snared them at all, nor been buoyed by the fallacious hope of one day making them complete. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that an imperfect book is the sign manual of a true (and impecunious) bibliophile. No folios of Philemon Holland's "Pliny" (1601), of Florio's "Montaigne" (1603), of Marvell (1681), of Ben Jonson (1640), of Sir Thomas Browne (1686), of Fuller's "Worthies" (1662), and others would have stood sentinel on the shelves. I had had no Donne's "Sermons" (1640), if one of its previous owners, finding a sermon short, had not with an almost incredible labour of love copied in manuscript the missing ewe lamb, making his letters, capitals, decorations and italics identical in every particular with those in print. There is no difference at all except that the written sermon is better done than the printed ones. Who would prefer a dull perfection to this lively monument of devotion? But for the prudish pornographer who tore out "The Rapture" from my Carew, he had remained decorative furniture in the Long Island residence of a wooden-pellets-for-raspberry-jam-maker; but for the mouthing worm in my Sir Thomas More, he had mouldered in ignoble ease in a book-shop; but for the worm that navigates, alas, through the pages of Purchas, I should never have possessed it nor fetched you out this ditty.

## TO A BOOK-WORM

“Worm i’ the book ! Now tell thou must why  
 Thou hatest sage antiquity  
 With Philistinish jealousy.  
 Is’t envy, appetite or lusty  
 Futurist rage against the musty ?

Truly I cannot diagnose  
 That a passion literary  
 Or love of learning urges thee  
 To drive thy forceps bellicose  
 Through Chaucer’s beard, Josephus’ nose.

Thou plough’st a metaphoric way  
 Into the lobe of Walton’s ear,  
 Through Hackluyt to Cape Finistere.  
 From Demonologies, thy prey  
 To Thomas More’s Utopia.

Not Drelincourt nor Baxter’s sermons  
 Nor Herrick’s hale Hesperides  
 Can stay thy gross voracities.  
 A fig for Arnold and the dons !  
 Thou plant’st an abscess in Shakespeare’s bones.

Thy boldness passes all belief,  
 For like some earth-contemning Mage  
 Thou growest into Lilly’s page ;  
 Hold’st from some Imp the heavens in fief  
 A Cancer in the astral leaf.

Not valetudinarians,  
Nor cannibals nor scavengers  
Can be so cynically perverse.  
Thou feed'st on Camden's last Remains,  
Nor the Diet of Wormes thy tooth restrains."

The acquisitiveness of the collector is, indeed, the enemy—he and his parasitic horde of middlemen booksellers. He might just as well collect old skulls as old books. The printer's devil prong him—he cares nothing for literature, for typography, for antiquity, for tradition, for the history of printing, for all the varied sentiments and amenities a library affords. I rack my mind for objurgation. I have it—he is only a few steps higher up than that nameless pestilence, that assassin of innocence, beauty, and freedom—the collector of dead birds. Two hundred years hence, he will assuredly be collecting books on Esperanto, written in simplified spelling. He wants a book, because there is no other specimen to be procured, because it is inexpensive, because it has some outlandish spice of bookishness about it that no rational person cares a paper-binding for, because it is printed upside down, because it has the arms of some king's concubine upon it, because it is garishly bound, because its author used to tame cockatrices, because he is a snob who would buy a vicarious reputation.

It is due to him that there are so many absurdities in the logic of prices. Why, for instance, should the first edition of Burton's "Anatomy" command a price of from £50 to £60 and the three folio editions (also printed at Oxford) which follow it of from £2 to £5? The first edition is an ugly, squat, obese and misshapen quarto,

published in 1621 *without* the famous engraved frontispiece of Le Blon. The fourth is a small and shapely folio, *with* the frontispiece and issued only eleven years later. Why should the first edition of Burns beat the first edition of "The Songs of Innocence" (supremely coloured by Blake for Flaxman) by £250? Both are of unique rarity. But is there any comparison between the two books *qua* books or the two poets *qua* poets? Blake has the bays but not the guineas. You cannot explain these things away by technicalities or degrees in rareness. I say they are absurdities, and the vested interest of the book trade is responsible for them. Let tradesman and collector be condemned to read Lucian on book collecting in Tartarus for a thousand ages. I have never been able to understand why pounds do not stick to the folio of that forthright old prelate, Dr. Joseph Hall ("Meditations and Vowes"), not because he is a man of wise saws and modern instances but because his book contains sixty-seven title-pages. Who is there who has been to a saleroom and seen the price of a book mounting to the roof simply because it has never been opened, will not agree with me?

Are there then any psychological milestones for the book-lover? Happily not. Each hunter must philosophize upon his own experience and each hunter, if that experience match the qualities of his mind, the secret fabric of his temper and character, is right. My own is too casual and untidy for any such deductions. When I first caught the afflatus, I used to buy pretty well any book with a calf covering upon it. My subsequent career has therefore been a progress in intensive repentance. I have been steadily eating my own books, or rather selling

them again. And I made innumerable false starts. I once had the idea of collecting one specimen of all the famous continental printers of the sixteenth century. But I had the sense to recognize that I was not an expert in the intricate perceptions of beautiful printing—even though I stumbled upon a truth shaking the pillars of the world in the process. That truth is that were all the printed matter in Great Britain set up in fine type, there would be an immediate revolution and the millennium be established.

So I discharged my continental printers, keeping only an early Froben in Latin (1527) with initials, headpieces, etc., designed in the Holbein manner and a typography that would set angels rubbing up their classics again. Quite innocently, I set a modern book of poems over against it. Parables exuded from the contrast. There was nothing shoddy or blatant about the representative of the modern ; it was only that it reminded me of an official frock-coat—the frock-coat which de Musset called a symbol of Europe mourning for its lost illusions. Here, mourning for its lost individuality, its lost passion, and philosophy of work. Books, like the houses they ought to live in, have in an age devoted to commerce and its stimulus to the acquisitive rather than the creative spirit of man been planed down to a minimum level of dull mediocrity. But in this Froben I was looking at the handicraft of a period in which trade and art were synonymous terms. “I am not greatly affected to new books,” said Montaigne, and Sir William Temple in his essay on ancient and modern learning, “whosoever conversed much among the old books will be something hard to please among the new.”

So after many experiments, much vain-gloriousness, and great sacrifices to the mere Diana of the chase, I discovered myself collecting nineteenth and twentieth century books that I wanted to read, and seventeenth-century English books out of a much more complicated lust. I do not omit the eighteenth century out of mere prejudice. For one thing imagination is absent. For another they are all very much alike in appearance. Except among a few Samurai the engravings are all vile, the title-pages all commonplace, and the printing all uniform. Neither Dodsley, Baskett, Foulis nor Tonson, good journeymen as they are, can compare with Pickering in the next century or some of the private printing of our own days (such as the Kelmscott, the Doves, the Pelican, the Chiswick, the Essex House and other presses, or even with serviceable publishing firms like the Oxford University and Shakespeare Head presses). Even the elegant Baskerville, of Prayer Book fame, is too affectedly free with flourishes to his lower-case lettering. But except for Grey, Collins, Smart and a few other poets I would just as soon have the eighteenth century in modern editions. It was not until the Romantic Revival and the giant race of bibliographers that the interest in books as books was reanimated.

What the eighteenth century lacks is the sentiment and aura of books, which grace even the abominable pirated editions of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Lastly, it has little of the edge of strangeness, excitement, waywardness, and personality, either in language, decoration or arrangement. The chap-books are of course an exception, and the mammoth folio of Prior (1718) is an ugly super-duck which appeals to bibliophily. Printing

was becoming a purely commercial enterprise, and I can imagine the printers' thrifty abhorrence of the un-economic superfluity of Sylvester's famous title-page to his poem on Tobacco : "Tobacco Battered ; and the Pipes shattered (about their Ears that idly Idolize so base and barbarous a Weed ; or at Least-Wise Over-Love so loathsom Vanity :) By a Volley of Holy Shot Thundered from Mount Helicon."

Pray do not misinterpret me. I am under no illusions as to the quality of seventeenth-century printing and book-robing. The continental printers knock it into the pulp room ; the designs of colophons and title-pages in sixteenth-century English books (though there is very little artistry in the alternative use of black and red), and the saucy, confident black letter of the more eclectic printers are superior. Legions of seventeenth-century print are simply drunk and debauched. The letters reel and catch at their neighbours for support. The language of the first folio Shakespeare, particularly, has gone to the type's head. Still book production was better than the work of the eighteenth century, which hides its vices under an official sanction—just as a Roaring Boy is better than a statesman. Book-title illustration too is not only quainter but finer. The dear, tipsy, angular woodcut has gone, but the engraving is in its sturdy youth. Crashaw (whom Pope so flagrantly imitated and as flagrantly patronized) is reputed to have done his own illustrations to the first edition of his "*Carmen Deo Nostro*." Many too of the old portraits are as realistic as you please. That of Drayton, which should shine in my 1619 folio, is exactly like that of any gentleman who spends his time toing and froing between Ealing and the City. A wreath

of bay leaves clings to a baldish head. As for the better kind of printer—George Eld and Robert Allot (who published many of the poets), Matthew Lownes (who published Spenser), William Barrett (who published Shelton's “*Don Quixote*”), John Smethwick (who published Drayton and “*Hamlet*” and helped to print the first folio of Shakespeare), Henry Herringman (the publisher of Dryden, Donne, and a host of plays), Robert Barker (the Bible monopolist), Edward Blount (who wrote a discriminating preface to the 1598 edition of “*Hero and Leander*”), and others—they are, I acknowledge, no more than honest workmen. They are remarkable for the books they printed not for the way they printed them. They are not at any rate such bandits as Thorpe and Jaggard who kidnapped Shakespeare's plays, and Thomas Pavier who printed “*Sir John Oldcastle*” as by Shakespeare. But let me not cast a stone at them, for it was the unprivileged non-monopolist nondescripts of the book trade who virtually gave us Elizabethan literature.

|But I am digressing into a lame apology. I was in a public library in the West of England some while back looking over an exhibition of early bookbinding. A leaflet hung by a string fastened to one of the cases. It had the shamefaced impudence to beg the public's pardon for an indecency inapposite to a time when only military deeds were of avail. A well-endowed public library, if you please! I do not apologize for wife or friends or dog or garden (whether the onion crop was a failure or not) or the birds who are kind enough to come to three meals a day in it. For the “midnight darlings” of the seventeenth century, like Sergius, I never apologize.

The book-lover indeed escapes all definitions and pigeon-

holes. Watts-Dunton has a criticism that poetic progress in metrical effects is from lawless freedom through tyranny to freedom that is lawful (take heed, ye Imagists!). But the book-lover is swayed only by the subconscious, compelling, secret law of his own emotion. He wants books to read, books to look at, and books with a jolly old date on the bottom panel of their backs. The more books I get, the more essential do I find the first condition in his Pilgrim's Scrip. "Incunabula," I confess, leave my feelings still cradled. But I respect collectors who feel towards them what I feel towards English books. I am aware that the bibliophile is an easy target for smart marksmanship. He is a dullard, a dotard, a grub, a pedant, a pettifogger, a second-hand observer of life, a potterer, an etiolated mole burrowing from REALITY, a palimpsest, a caterpillar feeding on the leaf. As if one little 18mo were not a greater reality than a score of Stock Exchanges and a dozen Wall Streets! Alas, I am not yet mellowed to passive resistance. I feel truculent over my loves. I would like to beat two stout folios like cymbals in the market-place and drone a jeremiad over the sciolism of this generation. Sweet are the uses of antiquity!

Indeed the mere lazy habit of picking about among books would be of advantage if only it taught a man the principle of desultory reading. "We get no good by being ungenerous, even to a book," says Mrs. Browning, and there is nothing more odious than the determinism which makes a solid meal of a book for the sake of profit. The only way to profit by a book is to enjoy it. And the profit will be in proportion to the enjoyment. How soundly Dr. Johnson, the most desultory reader in the world, equipped himself. Nor were his voyages among

books so confined to home waters as is supposed. He knew Camden, Fulke Greville, Barclay, Tom Coryat and many others of the more or less forgotten old people. He left a Stowe and a Holinshed in his will to Sir John Hawkins, his executor, and Boswell's black beast.

So, to end, I will string my lyre (made in Birmingham) and chant a Hymn of Praise :

#### BIBLYSIUM

“ We sleep beneath the eternal morn,  
 Or wake, whene'er the title-page  
 The herald of our loves and joys  
 Blows his enchanting horn.

Like mottled calf, among the trees  
 With leaves well-margined splash the rays  
 O' the sun, the first edition  
 Of this our Paradise.

No envious night can lower upon  
 Th' initials swaying in the breeze,  
 The quarto browsing on the turf,  
 The budding colophon.

The woodcuts flute their simple lay  
 In cloistered peace, unmindful where  
 Prowl tusky, huge and pachyderm,  
 The incunabula.

Aldus with anchor hooks lobbestere  
 And salts his catch with Pickering,  
 And ale into the beaker pours  
 The gentle Elzevir.

Old Stephan culls the plumpest fruit,  
Plantin will brew us savoury herbs,  
And Baskerville with opiate flowers  
Entwine his psalming lute.

No storms we fear, no cares we know,  
Recline we on the folioge,  
And crown us with the octavo bays  
'Neath the duodecimo."

## XIX

### LITERARY TRADITION (I)

MY DEAR X,

Is literary tradition valid or not? In this letter I will attempt not to put a didactic point upon the matter, but to hold myself responsible for my temper or attitude towards tradition. Please do not imagine I am such a fool as to think myself able to catch the flying skirts of truth; but I do feel there is a case for tradition in modern letters, and the neglect of it has done the literature of to-day no small amount of harm. To show you that I am aware it behoves me to walk delicately over a quaking ground I will, incontinent, call up the speakers of the opposition. Let us give ear to Hazlitt—a powerful adversary:

“What actual benefit do we reap from the writings of a Laud or a Whitgift, or of Bishop Bull or Bishop Waterland, or Prideaux’ Connections, or Beausobre, or Calmet, or St. Augustine, or Puffendorf, or Vattel, or from the more literal but equally learned and unprofitable labours of Scaliger, Cardan and Scioppius?”

Or again :

“The book-worm wraps himself up in his web of verbal

generalities and sees only the glimmering shadow of things, reflected upon the minds of others. Nature *puts him out.*"

Now Hazlitt of course has grave faults. He was in many ways a metallic kind of critic. He is dogmatic, full of testy prejudices, and fond of bristling. He is often incorrigibly superficial, as when he called Sidney's sonnets "jejune and frigid" and Carew (of "The Rapture" and "The Elegy on Donne") "an elegant Court trifler." He had nothing of the intuitive grasp of the metaphysics of expression that inspired the criticism of Lamb and Coleridge. But he was impatient of shams ; he pounced like a hawk on the false ; he was honest and solid and tempered like steel, and he knew a fool when he read one. But these passages do not daunt me because book-worming is not the same thing as faith in tradition, learning is not the same thing as knowledge, knowledge itself not the same thing as understanding, and St. Augustine is not the same thing as Scioppius, Cardan, Puffendorf or Bishop Waterland. Of two of the four indeed (Puffendorf I seem to have met in Boswell's parlour as an advocate of corporal chastisement for children, and Cardan, by chance, I found to be a two-headed twin with More called "Thaumast" in Rabelais) I confess I have never heard. Let them rot with Spondanus and Spence in the library of Limbo ! I would go perhaps even further than Hazlitt would. I should like to see Rhadamanthus introduce Shakespeare to his commentators ; I care not a dried and wasted fig for Beowulf, Caedmon or Cynewulf or Gower or Lydgate or Henryson or the ten thousand other pitchy ink-fountains from that royal prig King Alfred to the present day. I do not read the classics in

the original, partly because I have forgotten nearly all my Greek and Latin, partly because I prefer them in my own language (especially in the Elizabethan versions, as being robuster, more imaginative, fresher, fuller of the magic of words, and altogether jollier). They may not be very accurate but they are *literature*.

Hazlitt's argument indeed defeats itself. It is a *non sequitur*, because his sword is lifted, not against tradition but a slavish and mechanical imitation of it ; not against St. Augustine but Puffendorf.

The prosecution, however, has more substantial evidence than the mere charge of pedantry. It is sharp enough to recognize that the plaintiff is no mere *laudator temporis acti*. A better argument is that tradition is a deterrent to present inspiration and that preoccupation with our forerunners turns literature into a hunchback, with the hump of the past bending its knees and rounding its spine. Without constant experiment, without free hospitality to the throng of new ideas which stamp on its threshold, literature remains stiff and dour in its Bleak House. Where would your Elizabethans have been had they only preserved the mediæval continuity of literary fashion ? Where Bunyan, had he been stuffed with literature (Bunyan, who had the greatest tradition of all behind him—the Bible) ? To what was Shakespeare indebted but to the whirlwind of his own creative force ? Tradition is but custom and authority writ large, and custom and authority are the two horns of Satan. Literature is the snake that every spring renews its skin ; its freedom of movement is not increased by wrapping itself in a dozen discarded skins. Do you want the artist to be a Public School Gentleman and to express himself

like an admirable prize essay? Is he to conform to the best models like a respectable suburban householder, clumsily aping the metropolitan ease? Is he by imitation, by cowering under antiquity, to escape the exposure of his mediocrity and mental sloth?

The modernist *sans phrase* will even capture the trenches of the foe and turn his own machine-guns upon them. He will quote Daniel's "Defence of Rhyme": "It is not bookes, but only that great book of the world, and the all over-spreading grace of Heaven that makes men truly judicial" (as if true books were anything other than commentaries upon the "great book of the world"), or Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition": "True poesy, like true religion, abhors idolatry." And others. The modernist will even yoke the defenders of tradition with all those wrong-headed doctrinists (if it will be compatible with his attitude to know them) who at one time and another have tilted their pens at originality—with Gabriel Harvey and the "Areopagites" who plumped not only for the ancients but their quantitative metres in English poetry; with the Puritans scandalized by the Elizabethan dramatists on account of their departure from Biblical material; with Ben Jonson and his theories of the dramatic unities; with Campion's prudish disdain of rhyme, Campion, so happily forsaken in his melodies; with Goldsmith, Johnson, and Rymer in their classical advocacy; with the *Quarterly* and the art critics in their braggadocio contempt of Keats and Whistler. The critics in their antiquated armour are always wrong. The young Davids of originality slay these pompous Goliaths with their stones of spontaneous power.

That, I believe, is as fair a statement as I can construct.

I have tried to think of other arguments but for the moment they escape me. Wait a minute, here is another. Old men alone will write literature because only they will have had the time to acquire a granary of tradition.

Now the difficulty for the prosecution is that nobody except the scholiast would dream of disagreeing with its main thesis. Who on earth wants to send the good ship of the present down to Davy Jones with an excess cargo of superannuated conventions? The good ship will indeed float with any amount of cargo, provided its sails are well set, its pilot well seasoned, and its timbers well seamed and caulked. Who again wants a dead hand to come clutching out of the past, grasp literature by the hair and drag it back from its pilgrimage into the future? Tush, these are arguments for children afraid of the dark. Tradition will not be affrighted by them. As for Hazlitt's nonsense about reading (a terrific reader himself), he deserves Lamb's charming irony :

“ ‘ To mind the inside of a book is to entertain oneself with the forced product of another man’s brain. Now I think a man of quality and breeding may be much amused with the natural sprouts of his own.’—(*Lord Foppington* in *The Relapse*.) An ingenious acquaintance of my own was so much struck with this bright sally of his Lordship that he has left off reading altogether, to the great improvement of his originality.”

Moreover the hottest gospellers of the Here and Now have not given up reading. They are still book-worms—only they read the wrong things. Nor do our moderns live in the prancing days of the oral ballad.

Obviously, it is unprofitable to defend tradition from this point of view at all. In so far as tradition implies the diffusion of knowledge, the preservation of the amenities, the ingathered values of art and humanism, the landscape of man's quest for God in the symbols of beauty, nature, passion and adoration ; in so far as it implies a stable discovery and a permanent conquest of the spirit it has no enemies except among the mentally blind, the spiritually lame and halt. As such it is a vivid and present reality, and Hazlitt himself has to recognize it :

" I conceive that the past is as real and substantial a part of our being, that it is as much a *bona fide* undeniable consideration in the estimate of human life as the future can possibly be. To say that the past is of no importance, unworthy of a moment's regard, because it has gone by and is no longer anything, is an argument that cannot be held to any purpose ; for if the past has ceased to be, and is therefore to be accounted nothing in the scale of good or evil, the future is yet to come and has never been anything."

That reflection indeed unites the past to the present. If the retrospect of the past is dim and faded, on the same analogy, the future at any rate has no existence. Assuredly it is the present that is ghostly and insubstantial. So closely indeed do the past and the future press upon it that it is jerked out of any independent life. If we could for a moment cut ourselves loose from time, as the great artists of the world can, how paltry a thing is this clamorous Now—as feathery as a politician's rhetoric. All art is a desperate acknowledgment of this evanescence—a grim struggle to hold up time, as though it were a Gargantuan

policeman. The conviction has nothing personal about it. Shakespeare building his powerful rhyme *aere perennius*, Michel Angelo painting a crack on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel to induce the architect to strengthen the roof—here is no personal but an objective vision of everlastingness. An hour is a division of a day, a day of a year, a year of an age, an age but a pebble on the beach of eternity. A man grows and sails into the port of maturity, but his childhood lies like an ocean behind him. The memory of facts is not valuable, but the metaphysical total of facts is the only monitor we have to live by.

So let us have done with this arrogance of putting the past out of bounds and devoting ourselves to a present time shorn of its guide into the future. Indeed the search for novelty to which the moderns are so committed is a confession of a guilty conscience about the past, that apparition from which at all costs we must escape. We shall not escape it—it pursues us like the Hound of Heaven. There is nothing new under the sun, said Heine, and the sun is only an old warmed-up jest.

But by remarking this importunacy of the past, I do not mean that we should surrender ourselves as to the forced proximity of a neighbour playing the gramophone. After all, Dr. George Hakewill, whom Walton mentions and whose learning would be an obvious butt to the modernist, tells us peremptorily that there is such a thing as excessive reverence for antiquity. The superb literary past of England is not a feather bed to invite an idler to comatose indulgence. Nor is it an enemy to be dreaded and so derided, because it towers over a man

and dwarfs him into a defiant pygmy ; it is there as treasure to be recognized, possessed, and spent. It acts upon the artist in the same way as and in combination with the creative purpose, which, as I suggested, is not used by but uses the artist (who is not the god but the Sybil of the god) to accomplish itself. An infinite and barely perceptible hinterland encircles the little isolated patch of a genuine work of art, just as a faint blue aura envelops the sharply visible full moon. An artistic tradition is like a genial or rather congenial climate in which health and enjoyment abound, in which the vital faculties expand, and in which the whole man comes to his ripest :

“ Study therefore the great works of the great masters for ever. Study, as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, and on the principle upon which they studied. Study nature attentively but always with those masters in your company ; consider them as models which you are to imitate and at the same time as rivals with whom you are to contend. For no man can be an artist, whatsoever he may suppose, upon any other terms.”

Tradition indeed stretches the imagination ; it induces tranquillity, and it gives the artist poise and a sense of perspective. It supplies him with the conditions favourable to his art. It does not foster imitation. On the contrary it preserves even the richest artist from the most beggarly of all imitations and repetitions—that of himself. Christianity, for instance, is half a literary and half a moral tradition. The moderns, you may say, have worn the tradition bare, and the poverty and meaninglessness of Christianity is the result. But you cannot

weed out a tradition which has put certain universal truths upon beautiful record. At any rate it is the denial and parody of the Christian tradition, not the tradition itself which is responsible for up-to-date materialism.

For as in life, so in art, the greater part of modern literature is dominated by the lust of the present—by opportunism, expedience, the commercial demand of the moment, and by the intrusion of all manner of extraneous appeals (such as profit) which confine literature to ulterior motives and chance contingencies. Photography, impressionism, rapid absorption of ingenious forms, novelty in art, and journalism all represent a glutinous adhesion to the present. All these symptoms can only indicate the negation of order—not, mind, of mere technical facility—but of that essential coherence by which the artist adapts his material to the higher, inevitable laws of harmony and rhythm.

If further illustration is wanted, look at the unintelligible disorder of the world at present, its convulsive self-mutilation and plunge into the chaos from which, a step a century, it has so painfully climbed. Literature instead of lighting has only mirrored it. For this self-fascination, in which Narcissus so passionately gazes upon the watery simulacrum of himself, a sense of tradition is surely a corrective. We become aware of great forces behind us; the mind climbs up to a hill, takes stock of its surroundings, and catches glimpses that make it less forlorn; proportion rejects the usurper from his throne.

I do not want to plunge with you into the wrong alley here by confusing my expression with my idea. Let literature reproduce its period by all means. Its own

environment is its natural subject-matter. But, in reproducing its age, let literature avoid simply transferring the hotchpotch to its own plate. It will not reproduce its own age by answering welter for welter. It must pass its material through an artistic strainer. To do that it must get to an independent distance from it—a distance secured by literary tradition. Look at Henry James! He is an implicit traditionalist in the widest and deepest sense, in the sense of regarding humanity arrayed not in the latest fashion imposed by arbitrary time but humanity itself, past, present, and, by his extraordinary insight, to come. His art is the topmost branch of the aged literary oak. Has he neglected his own generation? Has he not rather made entirely fresh pilgrimages and wholly fresh discoveries of the intricate recesses of the human heart and head—a high priest in the ageless and deathless temple of art itself? Nor are his divine intuitions into the literary passion—"The Heart of the Lion," "The Next Time," etc., are unequivocally unique, they penetrate further than any artist has ever penetrated—his ironical purpose and his absolute power as a critic irrelevant to this apology.

As it happens Henry James's work neatly pricks the fallacy that literary experiment and literary tradition are irreconcilable. To make a facsimile of the past—that way lies death; to make a facsimile of the present—that way lies death. James did neither of those things. He worked from the inheritance of the past, and he created an inheritance for the future. He has actually revealed new sources to the springs of human conduct and nature; he has patented a new psychology; he is the profoundest, the most radical innovator of the century. But his in-

struments have been perfected in the workshop of endeavour, experiment and discovery in the art that lies behind him.

There is a passage in the "Biographia Litteraria" which seems to me to be pertinent to this question of tradition. By what principles, asks Coleridge, is the poet to regulate his style?

"I reply, by principles, the ignorance or neglect of which would convict him of being no *poet*, but a silly or presumptuous usurper of the name! By the principles of grammar, logic, psychology! In one word by such a knowledge of the poets, material and spiritual, that most appertain to his art, as, if it have been governed and applied by *good sense* and rendered *instinctive by habit* (my own italics this time) becomes, the representation and reward of our past conscious reasonings, insights and conclusions, and acquires the name of *taste*."

How are the principles to be applied? . . .

"By *meditation* rather than by *observation*. And by the latter in consequence only of the former. As eyes, for which the former has predetermined their field of vision, and to which as to its organ, it communicates a microscopic power."

Nor is this taste merely an infallible, inborn possession, which distinguishes falsehood and truth at a glance. As a man's disposition is the sum of an infinitely varied inheritance, so taste, however instinctive, has a long career of trials, experiments, selections, rejections, errors, comparisons and cross purposes before it can achieve the mature certainty. The two are not incompatible but complementary. If the present is vowed to action, the past is dedicated to reflection. Only by using tradition

can this taste, this reflection, this imagination compass its purpose and develop through forms of clumsy empiricism into its true and final Form.

This is a general sort of defence, but I do not think a concrete example of what I mean would be out of place. I mean to pick out a modern characteristic to which the application of literary tradition would be salutary. In short the Phrase. Personally I feel that the tyranny of the phrase is responsible for more than half the destructive conditions of modern life. By its invulnerable power, all the claptrap Napoleons of policy and commerce maintain their ill-gotten authority over the rank and file ; by it thought, honesty, and right feeling are expelled the state ; by it every contradiction is reconciled, every inconsistency shelved, every folly and injustice put in the seats of the mighty ; by it every sepulchre is whitened and the most obvious talons of Dan Lucifer appropriately sheathed in velvet. The phrase ! Surely, if it desired, it could throw the solid procession of the planets into a rout. I have even made a little distich about it, for which I beg your indulgence :

“ The phrases stood by God,  
Three hundred six and twain  
Dictators of the world,  
Their voices shook His fane,  
‘ Explain,’ said God, ‘ explain.’ ”

Well if the sense of tradition cannot explain Master Phrase (he is practically anthropomorphic to me) it can at least set him alongside a train of Esaus, who will make no mistake about their Jacob, fine though his lawn be, and purple his raiment.

I hoped to be finished with this subject in one letter but I see that I have still left untouched the historical objections I drew up at the beginning. So bear with me for one more letter.

## XX

### LITERARY TRADITION (II)

MY DEAR X,

Historically then the subject fines itself down into a single query—whether the cherishment of the literary past is compatible with originality. The opposition cites Shakespeare and the Renaissance. The plain answer is that the Renaissance flung itself on tradition like a hungry wolf, not only upon the classics but upon all the tradition open to them. Take the Elizabethan drama and its hundred or so playwrights. There is not one of them who did not ransack the entrancing corridors of human memory with the zest of a mob pillaging a palace. Chaucer, mediæval romance, the Italian novel in the original, or the translations of Painter, Fenton, Reynolds or Barnabe Riche, the *Commedia dell' arte* (to which Tarleton and Kemp the clowns owed so many of their gags and improvisations), the pastorals of Tasso, Guarini, Sidney, Lodge and Greene, popular legends and ballads, natural history and the old bestiaries and herbals, even the most craven superstitions. The whole of the English Renaissance was imported from Italy *via* France.

Is the result a labour of imitation, a mere casuistry of

adaptation, a smothering of the fresh native art? Rather they discovered all these riches and used them for their artistic purpose. Or take our brand-new bureaucracy, commerce, and the whole apparatus of official pomp, both finding and only seeking woolliness and deceit in expression, because they want to avoid trouble, because the precise concrete is death to them, because they are captivated with the hollow and resounding, because their *inexperience* and incapacity to choose leads them inevitably into floriferous diction. You may call them a vested interest but hardly a vested literary tradition. Is not their language inevitably documental, a convulsive gymnastic to get out of the way of truth and honest meaning? It is a bad thing I am afraid because the awe of its respectability stops ordinary people from using their wits. But it has its appealing side. These officials are like children playing with strutting tin words.

I do not want to press the matter too far. Certainly there are examples of tradition damping the sacred fire. The seventeenth-century French drama surrendered to classicism. Ben Jonson insisted on the Aristotelian unities to his hurt. And certainly theory seems to work in here with a corresponding bent and attitude of mind. It is not a mere arbitrary imposition. French literature has nothing like the freedom, the copious, profound and adventurous quality of our own. At its worst, it is fixed and set, at its best as lucid as a full moon. The French are indigenously, instinctively obedient to tradition. They carry it in their ink, and confusion of mind is the last thing you expect from them. But they are liable to set a point upon it, to elevate and formulate their natural sense into a conscious dogma and tyranny. By pursuing

only one or part of one tradition they turn it into traditionalism. The superiority of Racine to his successors lies in the fact that he took over the whole of the tradition, including the characterization which his fellows ignored. They took over the shell. So with Ben Jonson.

But our free and hearties, our parthenogeneticals, advance their plea by turning traditionalism into tradition. After all, the whole past, and not bits of the past, is behind us. Its infinite beauty and diversity are such that we have but to choose and take ; its light is of such radiance that to put it out is to wander in the dark as we, so tragically are doing. "Uneducated people," said Hazlitt, "have the greatest freedom from prejudice." Abominable heresy ! Having nothing else in their heads, they are stuffed with it like Christmas turkeys. How easy is it for such people to "swallow gudgeons" ? Unacquainted with truth, heedless of the long procession which has set out from its Tabard Inn of holy zeal and hope to find it, what can they do but gobble up lies ? Indeed, I would put my whole argument for artistic tradition (as for form) into one means of salvation alone—as a protest and reaction against meaningless decoration in life, against the sort of thing you see on the ceilings and fireplaces of London and suburban houses (including my own !), the sort of thing that forms our politics and social life. That decoration is the grave of the spirit, and I do not pretend that tradition is its birth. But it is the means, the womb of its birth, the great background of its creation. The spirit dies, and its material sprawls into every ugly posture. Whether the future will resurrect it is for our children to say. But let us and let them

keep the soil well weeded, turned and watered by the sweet labours of the past.

I will conclude my advocacy by giving an example (a somewhat fuller one than I have so far done) from the Elizabethan sonnet. This example is not meant to be anything more than a microcosm by which to show that a devoted loyalty to literary tradition—an almost blind loyalty—does not and need not infringe upon the rights of original interpretation. I will take Drummond of Hawthornden because he is supposed to be an extreme instance of a purely derivative artist. The question is not whether Drummond was a poet but whether he was a first-hand, an original poet. Now Sir Sidney Lee (a splendid scholar) is one of the chief crusaders against the Elizabethan sonnet as the sincere expression of feeling. He has denounced it as a “mosaic of plagiarisms,” a “medley of imitative conceits,” as, in short, a fashionable literary exercise, as artificial in kind as eighteenth-century Arcadianism. He has marshalled a mass of evidence from the sonneteers themselves. Sir John Davies, Gabriel Harvey and Chapman wrote parodies of the prevailing conventions. Davies fulminated against “base rhymers who daily beget bastard sonnets to their own shames and poetry’s disgrace”; Watson’s “Passionate Centurie of Love” brazenly acknowledges its subservience to foreign models; Drayton admitted his own borrowings, and had the audacity to deicide his contemporaries for filching “from Desportes’ and from Petrarch’s pen,” and the best of them coolly pocketed one another’s and the ring-master’s material, without a pretence of the grace of confession. Sir Sidney is concerned with disputing the autobiographical elements in

Shakespeare's sonnets, but his contention is much more apposite to Drummond. The general verdict on him is almost agreed upon affirming it. At least one-third (as modern editions testify) of Drummond's output is a direct adaptation or translation of Petrarch, Tasso, Marino (whose "Sospetto d' Herode" was translated by Crashaw), Guarini, Sannazaro, the Pleiade, Boscà, Garcilasco, the "Arcadia" and the "Astrophel and Stella" sonnet sequence. There is indeed hardly an idea or a simile in Drummond's sonnets which cannot be matched in Petrarch and his Italian, French, Spanish and English disciples. As Ben Jonson said, his poems "were all very good, but smelled too much of the schooles."

Against that I will put the following sonnet :

" What doth it serve, to see Sunnes burning face ?  
And skies enamelled with both the Indies' gold ?  
Or Moone at Night in jettie chariot roll'd ?  
And all the glorie of that starrie place ?  
What doth it serve Earth's Beauties to behold  
The mountaines pride, the Meadowes flowrie grace,  
The statelie comelinesse of Forrests old,  
The sport of Flouds which would themselves embrace ?  
What doth it serve to heare the Sylvans songs,  
The wanton Merle, the Nightingalles sad straines,  
Which in darke shades seeme to deplore my Wrongs,  
For what doth serve all that this world containes,  
Sith thou for whome those once to mee were deare,  
No part of them can have now with mee heare ? "

This beautiful sonnet, so full of restrained feeling, refers to the death of the poet's betrothed, Miss Cunningham.

There are a number of others which put this loss on poetic record, which are superior in unity and independence of expression to those which reflect a more abstract mood. Drummond's model for the sonnet I have quoted was Desportes' "Las ! que me sert de voir ces belles plaines ?" but the only close verbal resemblance lies in the form of apostrophe, and there is no imaginative affinity between workmanship of this exact and composed finish and Desportes' modishness, his harsh variations and frigid and tortuous phrasing. Sentiments of similar texture are of course bandied about by all the Elizabethan sonneteers, ingeniously twisted and travestied ; but in poetic rendering Drummond's sonnet is for all that entirely spontaneous and original.

Part of the theory which makes Drummond the slave of tradition is, I suspect, due to the quality of his poetic impulse. With the exception of Shakespeare, Sidney, and Spencer, his sonnets are as a whole the most perfect examples of technical accomplishment within the area of Elizabethan poetry. He has a fine felicity of manner. The most commonplace and the most strained of the contemporary images, analogies and similes are scrupulously rejected from his works. It is difficult to parallel a lapse like the following in the whole body of his poetry :

"Prometheus am I,  
The Heavens my ladyes eye,  
From which, I stealing fire,  
Find since a vulture on my hart to tyre."

His culture, refinement, and sense of melody and proportion strained away much impure and extraneous matter. Critics, pursuing the trail of derivation, have

objected to his formalism and his tendency to run in grooves. But he is never precisely stiff. What I find in his more ephemeral verse is a kind of frolicking with language.

There is no dalliance in the religious poems, the pastoral elegies, or in the majority of the sonnets. In them Drummond is something more than an expert in the balance of sentences and the harmonies of rhyme. He is something more than a technical expert. There are certain qualities of spirit in him which, at their finest bloom and allied to his faculty for symmetry, produce a well-nigh perfect adjustment of inspiration with its expression. Drummond is never a robust or trenchant thinker, and his caressing numbers have now and again a touch of effeminacy. Sweetness is the common attribute applied to him. Milton's nephew, Phillips, who edited the 1656 and 1659 editions of the "Poems," speaks of his sweet "calmnesse," in which there is "nothing that's harsh, unpolished, or constrained." Drummond, indeed, the recluse of Hawthornden, is the quietist of the Renaissance, and its thought, particularly the devotional, sank deep into the untroubled waters of his soul and there underwent the spiritual transformation which is his strongest claim to originality. His atmospheric effects and luminous word-pictures are akin to Spenser's. His is a reflective rather than ardent Muse, and sixteenth-century Platonic idealism is even more fully represented in him than in Sidney.

His poetic sensibility inevitably matches his metaphysical temper, his sober radiance, his sense of the mutability "of the seeming shows o' the world," and his infallible instinct for composition.

I am compelled to make this analysis, because it is upon this distinction between traditional material and its individual shaping that the poetic tests of Drummond's achievement ultimately rest. I will give another example not from a sonnet this time but from the "Hymne of the Fairest Faire," which the editor of the edition I possess calls an amplification of Ronsard's "Hymne de l'Eternité." It is worth quoting, not only as a light upon Drummond's original genius, but as an illustration of the unimpeded motion of his diction :

" Sad Queen of Silence, I ne'ere see thy Face,  
To waxe and waine, and shine with a full grace,  
But straight (amaz'd) on Man I thinke, each day  
His state who changeth, and if he find stay,  
It is in dreary anguish, cares and paines,  
And of his Labours Death is all the gaines.  
Immortal Monarch, can so fond a Thought  
Lodge in my breast ? as to trust thou first brought  
Heere in Earth's shadie cloister wretched Man,  
To suck the Aire of woe, to spend life's span  
Mid'st sighes and plaints, a stranger unto Mirth,  
To give himself his Death-rebuking Birth  
By sense and wit of créatures made King,  
By sense and wit to live their Underling ?  
And what is worse have Eaglets' eyes to see  
His owne disgrace and know an high degree  
Of blisse, the place, if thereto he might clime  
And not live thrallèd to imperious Time ? "

I hardly think it necessary to point the moral.

The truth is that it is highly dangerous to draw hard-and-fast inferences from the derivative artificiality of

the Elizabethan sonneteering vogue. Soon after the importations of Surrey and Wyatt the sonnet habit, like ceremonial, became the monopoly of the aristocratic minority. The Court clique of Sidney and his followers caught the epidemic and fathered it upon the motley company of town and university poets. Thence it spread to the poetasters, and finally wore itself out. The result was a kind of commonalty of thought and idea, a poetical citizenship implying definite laws. A poetic mode, thus limited and defined, naturally became a convention. The originality of the Elizabethan sonnet, therefore, sprang not from the poetic concept itself, but from the colour, the texture of the poets' work, not the idea but the method of its presentation and embodiment. It was then that the sonnet became an instrument susceptible, on the one hand, of the most perfect æsthetic polish and cunning of execution, and, on the other, of wanton ingenuities and extravagances. Inspiration was vested in the treatment rather than in the creation of ideas. But Drummond, like Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Daniel, and sometimes Drayton, did better than this. In spite of this potentially dangerous emphasis on style they did not allow themselves to be exploited by the sonnet tradition. What Drummond did, for all the mildness of his inspiration and his acceptance of the sonnet inheritance, was actually to make something better, fresher, and finer out of an almost too tractable and too formal material. He developed a form of his own out of a technique of inheritance.

So much for tradition. I do not, I repeat, wish to lay too much stress on my plea. But universally we are reading people, and much of what we read (not only in the

newspaper and *feuilleton*) vanishes with the day. Something solid and durable the world must build on the ruins that its own hands, regardless of aught but the temporary, have pulled about its head. The restoration of the traditional link with the art of the past is a conservative and revolutionary necessity.

## XXI

### TRANQUILLITY

MY DEAR X,

When the crackle of newspapers, like the rending of the sheeted iron of hell's cage at the release of the fiends, when the wolvish howls of the news-criers, raving beyond satiety for more prey and more prey and more prey, when the oratory of statesmen, blacker and more futile than the smoke of factories, when the volcanic mindlessness of war are too much for me, I sit down and think of quietness, the quietness of God. God is quieter than the inviolable darkness, than cities of dead men, than peace and the fallen ashes of subterranean fires. He is so silent, that could the sound of his quietness reach me, I should not hear the world if it burst like a rocket in space. So quiet that the colliding forces of the universe are only colours, wheeling in and through themselves like swallows, and Time is a pebble that falls into sleep. It is so minute, a grain of sand in a great desert, where all the eager pilgrim winds of thoughts cannot find it; so immense that the planets whirled like dead leaves in its breath are more still than shadows. It is no empty quietness, no asphyxiation of sound, because it contains all sounds and, environed by it, the exultant sun roars his

beams into the earth, and death is a grasshopper chirruping among its meadows. The quietness of God rests on the peaks of flames, whose tongues are the chanting of angels, whose lights are the symphonies of trees, rocks and birds, whose coals are the transfigured minds of men. The quietness of God came like a cry upon the earth, and the earth was beaten flat with it, and out of the desolation of all the agonies and passions and ideas and raptures since the beginning of the world, higher than the highest heavens, went up the thin blade of perfect and thanksgiving silence.

And evil? It is the noise which builds a prison about the quietness of God. Generation upon generation, labouring in the sweat of years, is encamped at the foot of the wall. There are some who make bricks, and their noise is like the forge of the proud giants; there are some who carry the bricks to the wall, and their tumult is the shock of uncounted armies outbrazening hate; there are some who climb upon the dizzy edges of the wall, and their steps are like the deep falling of tears of stone. The captains stand by the wall with whips (whose hissing is like the anger of destroying comets). Their arms are weary with blows, their eyes strain from their sockets, their faces are scored with the lash of desire and triumph, their hearts crack with the rending of earthquakes, and they are delivered into the quietness of God. For thousands of ages they have built the wall with bricks so hard that the furnaces of sacrificial beauty cannot melt them, so tempered that the sword of Gabriel cannot break them, so smooth and well-fitting that the javelin wind of light cannot pierce them. It is thicker than lethargy, stouter than folly, broader than power,

and loftier than ambition. It is called a temple of holiness, hung with arms and votive offerings, and God cannot escape, because within is the shrine that hums with the loudness of prayers. But the quietness of God is not within the temple.

Sharp discord bursts through his peace in terrible lightnings, the engines of confusion hurl their bolts into its bosom. Time brands his evil upon the forehead of the living with the stamp of his iron hoof, more blasting than the encounter of chaos, and the sparks have consumed us. But the quietness of God sings upon the spray of Heaven.

## XXII

### MYSTICISM OLD AND NEW (I)

MY DEAR X,

You, no doubt, have more data on the subject than I have, or for the matter of that any of us mortal puppets who dance at the end of the strings of the law of gravity. At any rate, I am quite sure that the old materialist science which confined us to this earthly brief span of existence, which has made us idolatrous to externals, for the sake of externals, is becoming senile. Partly because we are once more trailing at the tired and ragged end of a period of civilization and are dimly conscious of its approaching dissolution; partly because the ghastly holocaust of the European War has jerked us out of the arm-chair of comfortable dogma; partly because the failure of man's will to make the world fit to live in is a sharp reminder of his impotence to account for his own significance and destiny—these and other reasons are driving the few people who are conscious of our present nescience back again to metaphysics. I do not think the faint symptoms of a revival in seventeenth-century literature are irrelevant to this renewed concern in spiritual things. In our literature, the seventeenth century is the great age of mystical exploration. Burton's

"Anatomy," Sir Thomas Browne's "Vulgar Errors," and Donne's "Sermons," to mention only three of the most obvious prose works, are full of the boldest and abstrusest speculations as to the transcendental meaning of life; and the Christian orthodoxy of these writers and their kin only a passport for adventure. The seventeenth century, of course, has had a scarcely perceptible influence as yet, and only upon the poets of whom Ralph Hodgson is the best; but I am surprised at the number of average novels which, in greater or less degree and from very different angles of perception, deal with the supernatural. Modern literature is without doubt turning its mind towards the symbolic expression of ultra-consciousness. The attitude is, of course, tentative at present, and this ghost of a new religious feeling, by being loaded (owing to the war) with the Mrs. Radcliffian chains of gross superstition, ugly credulity, and the morbid itch for sensation, has come to haunt rather than to bless us.

But reaction against a materialism which even thoughtless people dimly feel to be responsible for the mockery of God which is modern war, will bring with it both violence and sanity. And this approach to mystical sanity is one of the most interesting things in contemporary life. Have we here the germ of a new-old religion which will attempt to fuse the by no means incompatible and irreconcilable significations of Paganism and Christianity? Why should not a potential religious revival correspond with, actuate, or depend upon a revival of literature?

Personally I do not see why a belief in a plurality of lives, past and future, should not one day become of commonplace acceptance. The writers of "Ecclesias-

tical Sonnets" and of "Evelyn Hope" were not censored for positively affirming it. Christianity indeed, while admitting the immortality of man, is reluctant to grant him pre-existence—as though this terrestrial life were his jumping-board into ether—or the abyss. But that conjecture is based on an ethical concept, and I see no reason why Christianity should not in time accept man's present span of years as a portion in a periodic mortality instead of conceiving it as an anticipation of a final eternity. Is the absolute of God disintegrated because the potential lot of man may be many lives rather than one life, many deaths rather than one death? Such a doctrine would not abolish but postpone the ultimate consummation of man in God. Ah, what would not the generations of men give for an assurance that after multiple experience, after æonic pilgrimage, after the flux of centuries, after the defeats of the unconquerable spirit and the triumphs of immediate matter, they might in an undiscovered future more remote than death, more desirable than life, redeem the frustrations of their several efforts? But who is there, who has there ever been, so conscious of the unspeakable radiance of perfection that he can leap from the tomb of this present life full into the bosom of Abraham?

" Yet some, who all this while did weep, and sing,  
And sing and weep, soar'd up into the *Ring*,  
But most would use no wing :  
O fools (said I) thus to prefer dark night  
Before true light,  
To live in grot, and caves, and hate the day  
Because it shews the way,

The way which from this dead and dark abode  
Leads up to God,  
A way where you might tread the Sun, and be  
More bright than he.  
But as I did their madness so discusse  
One whisper'd thus,  
This Ring the Bride-groome did for none provide  
But for his bride."

That vast numbers have so believed is only another symptom of the ludicrous conceit of men, who actually deny a future beyond death to the sinless and life-intoxicated birds and beasts, while complacently assuming it for their muddled and systematized selves.

I hardly think that the pundits of mysticism have led the revulsion of the age against an over-blown materialism. The process must be intellectual and not sentimental. True mysticism is something very different from a lisping simplicity or a perfervid vagueness sometimes tempted to "fiddling harmonics on the sensual string." But I fancy I hear you dryly remark that this new preoccupation of literature with mystical truth, simply as a matter of subject, is of little enough integral value. How it is going to serve social or literary ends, you cannot imagine. Nor can I, but I prefer to hope that it will.

Consider genius for a moment (in all irrelevance) in its relation to the Elizabethans. The phenomenon is not that of an unusual number of inspired men herded by chance into a little pen of time, but that of a society, a community, almost a nation of genius. A London householder, who has succeeded in cultivating a sunflower in his back garden, is gratified but not bewildered. But if

he looks out of his window one morning and sees the neighbouring common pressed down and running over with sunflowers, as though the sun had descended and taken to his majesty a bride, he will gape. That the Elizabethans laid the foundations of an imperial destiny and all the rest of it is regrettable. But, after all, these things are trifles compared with the miracle of this flowering of the mustard tree. There is the still more remarkable example of the cathedrals of the Middle Ages built by the collective inspiration of Tom, Dick and Harry. Of course there are historical explanations, and the whining schoolboy is familiar with them. But the historian cannot encompass this inspiration. It is no superstition that it transcends rational argument and hypothesis. Some extraordinarily consonant readjustments and recombinations of intellectual substances took place—and lo, Shakespeare was, the Authorized Version of the Bible was. Remember that for the moment I am dealing with the metaphysics of genius itself, not with the results. The fact that the Elizabethan inspiration took a secular course and that the religious literature of the earlier time was notably deficient in any attribute except that of dullness, does not affect the point. Genius is always irrational, whatever its utterance and whatever sublunary pains and labour are necessary for giving it utterance. The earthly visitation of genius is of vital moment to any discussion of metaphysics.

I have long thought that a metaphysical study of Shakespeare, probing even deeper than Coleridge and Professor Bradley, was needed in England. After all, what a remarkable thing it is that practically nothing is known of the life of Shakespeare. Even the work of Sir

Sidney Lee, the least diaphanous and fantastic of the existing lives as it is, is based not on fact but on inference, conjecture, reasonable supposition, and analogy. The Baconians, were they not confronted by their universalist's own goose-step in verse, might be allowed a case. Yet why should Shakespeare's life be so crowned with the cap of darkness? He was not a Stratford recluse; he lived and wrote well within the circumference of London literary activity; he was patronized by the Court; he was a personal friend of Drayton and Ben Jonson; he collaborated with John Fletcher; he was a shareholder in the *Globe*; he was a country gentleman with the deeds of his estate surviving; he left Mrs. Shakespeare his second best bed in his will. But as for any substantial evidence about his life—we know even less of him than of Massinger, whose two-worded epitaph celebrates the triumph of obscurity. That nobody bothered to write about him only partly explains it. We know a great deal about Chaucer.

Then again, look at some of his characters. Is Iago a man? Is Hamlet a man? Is Lear a man? Are they even supermen? No, they are metaphysical entities, anthropomorphic shapes, representations of incomprehensible, imponderable forces. Call me if you will, a thing I detest—a dabbler in the occult. I still maintain that there is something transcendental about Shakespeare; something outstepping and excelling common experience. Even a certain commonplaceness about him, his often vulgar prejudice (I do not refer here to his contempt of the mob—in which, to my mind, he was perfectly right: the mob or the man in the street is always the bulwark of corruption and despotism in high places), his habits of

bombast and pot-boiling, his loose artistic conscience, his business eye glistening for the main chance, throw into relief and contrast the surpassing beauty of his best work, as though he wrote it not only as a conscious but a subconscious artist. All art, of course, works through this subconscious experience, and it is one of the uses of tradition that it is gathered up subconsciously by the artist. But the example of Shakespeare throws the whole thing into dazzling illumination.

Or take the Bible. Granted that the versions published before 1611 provided the translators with a stock of idiomatic phrase, literary feeling, and well-directed industry of which they made every use. Granted that the conditions and environment in which they laboured were of unique advantage. Granted that the English language at the beginning of the seventeenth century was at its maturest development, highly cultivated and yet free on the other hand from the *cliché* of old and over-practice, and on the other from the necessary but wasteful and clumsy experiments of an archaic past. Granted the fresh and spontaneous enthusiasm for the classics ; granted the value of rhythmic divisions in the text, which imposed a healthy restraint upon the vicious Elizabethan habit of cumbering a sentence with shapeless, graceless, convoluted paragraphs, and punctuating its mazy windings with a dust-storm of commas.

For all that the miracle (there is no other word for it) of the Authorized Version—the prose work whose perfection is unique in any language and in any epoch—was accomplished by a company, a committee of learned divines, unofficered by a personality of literary genius and none of whose other work approached within conti-

nents of it in literary quality. The Elizabethans were notable collaborators, and half a dozen of them could turn out a creditable play. But forty-seven scholars—of whom only a few are known at all, and one only—Andrewes—to fame—who are they to issue a masterpiece which “lives in the ear like a music that can never be forgotten,” whose “felicities seem to be almost things instead of words”; which “is a part of the national mind and the anchor of national seriousness”? “The memory of the dead passes into it; the potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses; the power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words.”

As if this were not an oddity enough—we have another company, another committee in method and constitution not unlike the conquering forty-seven. I refer to the egregious authors of the Revised Version, the theological pirates, who commandeered the Authorized Version and “emended it” with their hatchets and choppers. Saintsbury (a virile, genuine critic, whatever his style) points out that these children of Attila made “the pedantic substitution of ‘mirror’ for ‘glass’” in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, “it having apparently occurred to some wiseacre that glass was not known to the ancients, or at least used for mirrors. Had this wiseacre had the slightest knowledge of English literature, a single title of Gascoigne’s ‘The Steel Glass’ would have dispensed him at once from any attempt at emendation; but this is ever and always the way of the sciolist.” “Steel glass,” I may add, also occurs in Hackluyt.

But I must pull up my steeds, ere they clothe their necks with thunder, ere they go on to meet the armed

men, ere the quiver rattles against them, the glittering spear and the shield ; ere they swallow the ground with fierceness and rage ; ere they say among the trumpets “ Ha, ha ! ” and smell the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting.

I am not attacking the Revised Version on its textual or its theological accuracy to the originals, but simply as literature. As literature, what honest man of letters will not endorse my offensive ? As scholarship, the need of rendering the Hebrew more exactly may be the Revised Version’s translators. But, measured thus, Langhorne’s Plutarch is a better translation than North’s, Cotton’s Montaigne than Florio’s, Johnes’s Froissart than Berners’s, Jarvis’s and Phillips’s Don Quixote than Shelton’s. If the Revised Version shows an improvement in accuracy of translation, it hardly shows to the same advantage in accuracy of *meaning*. If it did, what matter ? The Authorized Version is a living thing in itself ; it is the nurse of literature. The Revised may belong to theologians—but no further, if you please. But my Telamonian antics leave me exhausted at the end of this letter.

## XXIII

### MYSTICISM OLD AND NEW (II)

MY DEAR X,

No, a committee, even though it sat upon the top of Mount Helicon, ought not, by most canons of reason, to expect its chairman's ruler to be Apollo's laurel bough. The Revised Version is indeed the worst in literary taste and feeling that has appeared in England. If anyone doubts this let him read the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, first in the Authorized, then in the Genevan, and lastly in the Revised Versions. "As in a mirror darkly" (think of it!) is not the only instance of the academic mutilations of the last mentioned —as indeed might be despairingly expected, after reading the Preface, wherein the "archaisms" of King James's Bible are, with Laputan head-shakings and beard-strokkings, solemnly animadverted upon. Here are a few of the modernisms in that same chapter: A.V. "a tinkling cymbal," R.V. "a clanging cymbal"; A.V. "so that I could remove mountains," R.V. "so as to remove mountains"; A.V. "seeketh not her owne, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil," R.V. "seeketh not *its* own [poor dehumanized charity!], is not provoked, taketh not account of evil"; A.V. "Rejoiceth not in iniquitie but rejoiceth in the truth," R.V. "Rejoiceth not in un-

righteousness but rejoiceth *with* the truth"; A.V. "whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away," R.V. "whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away"; A.V. "But when I became a man, I put away childish things," R.V. "Now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things"; A.V. "but then shall I know even as also I am known," R.V. "but then shall I know even as also I have been known" (one would have thought it an elementary knowledge in a translator that the English language is not susceptible to such particularities of tenses). These are only the more prominent "improvements in accuracy" in a prose poem of thirteen verses. I have taken no account of the exasperating changes of "though" to "if," "and" to "but," and vice versa. Perhaps I have carried this digression into the jungle, but it seems to me that the Revised Version cannot be dismissed as the mere peddling of scholiasts, but is a kind of tumour that has gathered out of a diseased body—a disease which has corrupted English thought and utterance and through which the Authorized Version no longer permeates our blood, inspires our speech, ripens our feeling, and indurates our mind.

Now, of course, I do not want to put any doctrinal construction upon the noble felicity of the Authorized Version; I am treating it as literature and not as religion. All I would imply is that Victorian materialism has something to do with the Revised Version. All I would imply is that genius makes strange voyages, that imagination is the ladder to and from heaven, and that Shakespeare and the Bible are islands of Hesperides shot from a deep whose visionary treasures the eye of man hath not seen nor the mind conceived.

All great art, all genius, is indeed symbolic—the only measure we possess of man's eternal inheritance. It absorbs religion ; it absorbs and transmutes all human activities, from their most degraded to their most exalted. Its processes are invariably alchemic—a refining of baser metals. Actual realism that is to say must always diverge from true art. It is not enough to make a transcript, however exact and methodical, of human character or natural objects. The personality of the artist is not enough ; the themes appropriate to his instruments and purpose are not enough. A something objective, absolute, infinite enters into the composition of the greatest works of art, and in gusts and flickers even into the lesser. Only the perfect combination of the various perceptions and ferments that go to make the unity of a work of art can make it—shall I say—a microcosm of reality. But in the accomplishment, it has passed out of the hands of the artist. He is the instrument and not the creator. No contradiction is involved by the admission that the personality of the artist is still implicit and perceptible in the culmination of his work. Keats' "Oft have I travelled in the realms of gold," Shelley's "I met a traveller in an antique land" both attain that consummation ; there is a similarity of sound between them over and beyond word identities. But no one could mistake the one for the other. It would seem as though the personality of the artist also became objective—enlarged and unconfined, the goal rather than the prisoner of his ego.

Consider the impression on the reader of a perfect line or stanza. You are conscious of two preoccupations. Such lines or stanzas are at once familiar to you ; you knew

them from the beginning of the world ; you will carry their moral and artistic stamp with you to its end. You are affected by a sense of permanence, of diurnity, of a stability mastering time and place—so permanent, so everlasting, and so stable that you can feel the wind of temporal and vanishing things rushing by you through space. It is a truism, but great art is a mystical revelation, the seal and imprimatur of the divine.

I don't want to labour the point, but I think that a revival of art may be predicted from a renewed interest not so much in the spiritual phenomena as in the spiritual implications of the universe. The movement is perhaps getting hold of the wrong end of the stick ; but you may be sure that wherever that curiosity exists art will ultimately embrace and recreate it. Modern poetry, as it is, is full of philosophic speculation ; is it too much to hope that one day poetry will again become a metaphysic in itself ?

The present revival of poetry is perhaps artificial. It is a reaction from an agonized sickness and disgust at the war. But that reaction may very well be a cautionary sounding before a truer voyage towards a more permanent vitality. The work of Ralph Hodgson and a few others is a warrant that poetry is beginning to realize that it can express the divine and the abstract only by means of forcible, vivid, and concrete symbols of them—by becoming, that is to say, at once classical and popular. That is the best and truest hope for the future. Great literature takes this form, and the moderns, with so much experience behind them, should surely be able to do great things with it. And from the point of view of the

concrete illustrating the abstract, the Gospels themselves have, of late years, taken on a new significance. Even on the hypothesis that Jesus was not the son of God, on the hypothesis that he never so much as existed, the value of the factual, tangible legend as a symbol of the self-dedication of the creative imagination to the cause of God, of humanity, of posterity, of art, of the immortality of the soul, of what you will, and of its ultimate triumph over matter, is incalculable. Says Chaucer, at the end of "Troilus and Cressida": "Go litel booke, go litel myn tragedie, ther God thy maker yet."

I will conclude this letter by quoting a passage from Donne's "Sermons," a passage which I discovered through the courtesy of A. H. Bullen, who told me that he had never met a literary man who had ever heard of it. I quote it partly as a curiosity, most of it being but a single sentence and covering a whole single-column page of a large folio; partly because it is to my mind the noblest, the most majestic and terrible passage in orchestral style and thought throughout the whole range of English prose literature outside the Bible. But its astounding eloquence is not my principal reason for quoting it. It seems to me to throw a fierce and quite undogmatic light upon the ultimate and widest meaning of poetic art—not to preach or to edify, but to reveal God, and so draw men into the company of God. The sermon is called "He that believeth not shall be damned":

"When all is done, the hell of hells, the torment of torments is the everlasting absence of God and the everlasting impossibility of returning to his presence; *Horrendum est*, says the Apostle, *it is a fearfull thing*

*to fall into the hands of the living God.* Yet there was a case, in which David found an ease, to fall into the hands of God, to scape the hands of men ; *Horrendum est,* when God's hand is bent to strike, *it is a fearfull thing to fall into the hands of the living God* ; but to fall out of the hands of the living God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination.

“ That God should let my soule fall out of his hand, into a bottomlesse pit, and roll an unremoveable stone upon it, and leave it to that which it finds there (and it shall finde that there, which it never imagined, till it came thither), and never thinke more of that soule, never have more to doe with it ; that of that providence of God, that studies the life of every weed, and worme, and ant and spider and toad, and viper, there should never, never any beame flow out upon me ; that that God, who looked upon me when I was nothing, and called me when I was not, as though I had been, out of the womb and depth of darknesse, will not look upon me now, when, though a miserable, and a banished, and a damned creature, yet I am his creature still, and contribute something to his glory, even in my damnation ; that that God, who hath often looked upon me in my foulest uncleannesse, and when I had shut out the eye of the day, the Sunne, and the eye of the night, the Taper, and the eyes of all the world, with curtaines and windowes and doores, did yet see me, and see me in mercy, by making me see that he saw me, and sometimes brought me to a present remorse, and (for that time) to a forbearing of that sinne, should so turne himself from me, to his glorious Saints and Angels, as that no Saint, nor Angel, nor Christ Jesus himself, should ever pray him to looke

towards me, never remember him, that such a soule there is ; that that God, who hath so often said to my soule, *Quare morieris ?* Why wilt thou die ? and so often sworne to my soule, *Vivit Dominus*, as the Lord liveth, I would not have thee die, but live, will neither let me die, nor let me live, but die an everlasting life and live an everlasting death ; that that God, who, when he could not get into me, by standing and knocking, by his ordinary meanes of entering, by his Word, his mercies, hath applied his judgments, and hath shaked the house, this body, with agues and palsies, and set this house on fire, with fevers and calentures, and frightened the Master of the house, my soule, with horrors, and heavy apprehensions and so made an entrance into me ; that that God should frustrate all his owne purposes and practices upon me, and leave me, and cast me away as though I had cost him nothing ; that this God, at last, should let this soule goe away, as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble, and that then this soule cannot be a smoake, a vapour, nor a bubble, but must lie in darknesse as long as the Lord of light is light it selfe, and never sparke of that light reach to my soule ; what Tophet is not Paradise, what Brimston is not Amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded, eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God ? ”

Comment is an impertinence ; but I cannot help wondering what that popinjay, the Earl of Carlisle, before whom the sermon was preached, can have thought of it.

The nation that produced Shakespeare and the Jaco-

bean translators of the Bible may seem to have mortgaged its inheritance to the usurers of materialism. It may encumber but it cannot abolish its racial memory. For what has been may perhaps be again.

## XXIV

### CREATIVE FORM

MY DEAR X,

I well remember the first time I saw a collection of Dürer's drawings, woodcuts, and portraits. It was, I assure you, a hair-raising experience. I went to bed very late that night, and all I had to say in the early hours of the morning was : "Yes, after all, even if civilization is skin deep, Man is the image of God as clearly as he can be the image of Satan." The astounding reconciliations ! A divine inspiration seeking the divine through an agony that almost sweats tears, and an earthly tenderness that does not forget St. Jerome's carpet slippers. A bodiless spirituality consorts with a riotous fancy ; a mob of swirling figures is gathered into one. Average life realized with luminous ease, detachment and fidelity becomes life transfigured into another dimension altogether. The extremes of wrath and terror mate with humility and compassion ; torment with the security of bliss ; passion with quietude ; a lover more holy than an angel is hovered over by an angel even more companionable than one of Cowper's hares ; here are humanity and divinity, art and morality inseparably one ! Man is disparadised, but Eden's soil is on his feet. Dürer—the

prototype of Blake and of Don Quixote the theorist, the living symbol of the minority, always wrong and so often right, *jure divino!* Dürer—the parent both of the prophet and of Mr. Every-day-work-and-play! How was it that Dürer could realize his vision and make it universal with such perfection of workmanship? I can only hazard by the felicity of creative form, achieved by a devotion without compromise to the work and pain of shaping his imagination.

Dürer leads me on to Henry Vaughan, and makes me idly wonder why Vaughan, with something of the same mystical power and transcendental impulse, failed to be the Dürer of literature. You have no need to remind me of Dürer's infinitely greater variety and stronger grasp of the material transmutable by art. I agree that there is no sort of kinship between the two, but it is this matter of form made living and appropriate by the one and so seldom by the other that induces me to air my preferences under the cloak of what some will no doubt call a shibboleth of art.

Henry Vaughan is still one of the curiosities of letters. It is not that he has been ignored as Traherne was. On the contrary, wherever the "Metaphysicals" are gathered together under a general survey, there is Vaughan in the midst of them. That is the point—he hardly exists in the eyes of the text-book as a separate personality, but only as contributing to the "group-consciousness" of his fellow-mystics. He has been only a tree in the orchard of seventeenth-century devotional poetry. Saintsbury, for instance, whose range and knowledge make him an excellent guide to the passes of good literary preference, hardly mentions him except under persuasion and in a

reluctant foot-note. Wordsworth, who unquestionably owed something of the inspiration of his Immortality Ode to Vaughan's "The Retreate"—

" Happy those early dayes ! when I  
Shin'd in my angell-infancy.  
Before I understood this place  
Appointed for my second race,  
Or taught my soul to fancy aught  
But a white, celestiall thought.  
When yet I had not walk'd above  
A mile or two from my first love,  
And, looking back (at that short space),  
Could see a glimpse of his bright face ;  
When on some gilded cloud or flow're  
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of eternity."

—who, indeed, possessed Vaughan's works, as the catalogue of his library betrays, never acknowledged him. Only the splendid work of recent editors has reinstated him.

Now it would be paradox to deny that Vaughan was himself partially responsible for this. In his four books of poems he seems deliberately anxious to hide his poetic personality under a bushel. His early love-poems to "Amoret," largely fashionable exercises and metrical experiments, and the verses in "Olor Iscanus" (Swan of Usk—1651), his first considerable volume, are, some of them, modelled on the school of the court lyrists, such as Cleveland; the satires and epistles, whose only impulse is a barren tortuousness, on Donne; others on Sandys, Randolph, Herbert, and patristic writings. "Thalia

Rediviva" (1678), a playground for the casual revels of tropes, figures, similes, euphuism, analogy, and allusion, owes allegiance for its delicate sweetness to Marvell and Herrick, for its formality and ingenuity to Davenant, Waller, and Denham, the *commissionaires*, so to speak, of the Augustan school of verse. To "Silex Scintillans" (1650-1655), where Vaughan, do what he might, could no longer avoid his intrinsic originality, Herbert, whose "Temple" appeared twenty years earlier, was of course the spiritual foster-father.

It was by his relation to Herbert that Vaughan compromised and obscured his reputation. The impression left upon me by the body of his work is the cleavage between his poetic impetus and its appropriate content. The whole of Vaughan's poetry reflects the strain, the anguish of attempting to reconcile the two. For—let there be no mistake about it—Vaughan's *thought*, the transcendental cast of his vision and imagination, owes nothing to anybody. His subtle and passionate apprehension of the spirit makes him not the tributary but, with the exception of Donne, the fountain-head of the "Metaphysicals." None of them has his feeling for Nature, for childhood (excepting Traherne), his hatred of wars and politics, or his power of clothing the divine presence in the garment of the visible world. In this respect Vaughan's mystical philosophy anticipated both Wordsworth and Shelley. His sense of the harmony of creation and of man's religious intimacy with elemental forces is at times so poignant that he might almost be a preface to the "Songs of Experience." The disjointed but magnificent music of "Corruption" is an instance :

“ Man, in those early days,  
Was not all stone and earth.  
He shin’d a little, and by those weak rays,  
Had some glimpse of his birth.  
He sigh’d for Eden, and would often say,  
Ah ! what bright days were those ?

“ Nor was Heav’n cold unto him ; for each day  
The valley or the mountain  
Afforded visits, and still Paradise lay  
In some green shade or fountain.  
Angels lay leiger there ; each bush and cel,  
Each oke and high-way knew them.  
Walk but the fields, or sit down at some well,  
And he was sure to view them.”

Vaughan, indeed, but rarely falls into the “ Metaphysical ” trick of pirating unfamiliar natural phenomena, not for emotional, but for verbal experience. Nearly all his imagery from Nature is a symbol of, an index to, the universal mind. The correspondences with Shelley, though less obvious, have their place. With Vaughan, as with Shelley, the world of man was the counterfeit of the unseen, eternal reality—the mask of the spirit, rather than a milestone to heaven. Vaughan denied the body too, as Donne’s more robust vision did not. Man’s pursuit of the illusions of the world dulls him to lethargy, or pricks him to restlessness. His salvation is to discover and reveal those glimpses and reflected fires from the divine which are his means of communion with it. So in the poem on “ Man ” :

“ He knocks at all doors, strays and roams,  
Nay, hath not so much wit as some stones have,

## LETTERS TO X

Which in the darkest nights point to their homes,  
 By some hid sense their Maker gave ;  
 Man is the shuttle to whose winding quest  
     And passage through these looms  
 God order'd motion, but ordain'd no rest.”

or as in the exquisite “The Dawning” :

“ Ah ! what time wilt thou come ? when shall that crie  
 The Bridegroome’s coming ! fil the sky ?  
 Shall it in the evening run,  
 When our words and works are done,  
 Or will thy all-surprising light  
     Break at midnight ?  
 When either sleep, or some dark pleasure,  
 Possesseth mad man without measure ;  
 Or shall these early, fragrant hours  
     Unlock thy bowres ?  
 And with their blush of light descry  
 Thy locks crown’d with eternitie ;  
 Indeed, it is the only time  
 That with thy glory doth best chime.  
 All now are stirring, ev’ry field  
     Ful hymns doth yield.  
 The whole creation shakes off night,  
 And for thy shadow looks the light.  
 Stars now vanish without number,  
 Sleepie planets set and slumber.  
 The pursie clouds disband and scatter,  
 All expect some sudden matter.  
 Not one beam triumphs, but from far,  
     That morning star.”

Unfortunately Vaughan’s actual expression is rarely adequate to his thought. It is only in perhaps a score

of the poems in "Silex Scintillans" (his supreme achievement) that the form really elicits the idea. It is this inarticulateness, this only *potential* sublimity, that has obscured his lustre and diverted many from reading him except in anthologies. The earth lies heavy on his riches. Vaughan is rarely grotesque, as Crashaw sometimes is ; he does not debauch language by speaking of tears as "walking baths, compendious oceans." When he strains or perverts a figure it is not out of wantonness, but because his painfully struggling idea can only grope a contorted way to life. It is extraordinary that Traherne, with his triumphantly mobile and symmetrical expression, should have been identified for two centuries with Vaughan.

What you find as the result of this divorce between the spiritual impulse and its metrical presentment are prosiness, flatness, aridity. Page after page of Vaughan's work is parched for want of the easy moisture of creative form. His passionate thought strikes a simile which generates another. Another radiates from that. Down they all go in dishevelled procession. At his worst, he cannot even command the rudiments of metre. He is as much at odds with his pauses, accents, and feet as with the proportions and rhythm of his language.

I cannot doubt that Vaughan was acutely conscious of this. Except where his utterance flows into concord with his poetic conception, this wrestling with the clay is manifest in every line, and to realize it is in great measure to solve the problem of his borrowings. It is important to notice that, on the whole, Vaughan does not borrow material, but phrases. When he does, as though he were held up in his effort to embody his thought, he takes them over bodily. The fact that they often read irrele-

vantly to the march of his ideas—as though they were asides—strengthens the impression that they are temporary stopgaps. Vaughan is, indeed, sometimes derivative in his treatment of certain themes, and in his construction of certain conceits. But the “Metaphysicals” possessed a common stock, a reservoir of orthodox material, just as the Elizabethan sonneteers did. That does not impair Vaughan’s originality. His usual process is, as I have said, to transplant lines and sentences wholesale. This helps to explain his particular indebtedness to Herbert. It was natural that Vaughan, the artist of ideas, should pay an exaggerated respect to Herbert, the artist of words. It is not the only instance in literature where the greater and more irregular mind has deferred to the lesser and neater one. Vaughan’s inspiration looked to Herbert’s more formal measures, not to stimulate, but to clothe it. His illusory, pathetic modesty sought blindly for form and in its eagerness pursued the lesser star of composition. It was a mistake, but an intelligible one. Only in the rare intervals, when Vaughan’s imagination created its own felicitous content, did he shake off the weight of the clay like dew.

“ Were all my loud evil days  
Calm and unhaunted as in thy dark tent,  
Whose peace but by some angel’s wing or voice  
Is seldom rent ;  
Then I, in Heaven, all the long year  
Would keep and never wander here.

But living where the sun  
Doth all things wake, and where all mix and tyre

Themselves and others, I consent and run  
To ev'ry myre.

And by this world's ill guiding light  
Erre more than I can do by night.

There is in God (some say)  
A deep but dazzling darkness, as men here  
Say it is late and dusky because they  
See not all clear.

O, for that night ! where I in him  
Might live invisible and dim.”

That is Vaughan transfigured and breathing air in which Herbert could not live. That is Vaughan wearing heaven like a well-fitting cloak. When he writes like this (and there are plenty of other sporadic passages in “Silex Scintillans” of the same kind) there is no poet in the English language who is his better. We feel that this spasmodic form of Vaughan’s is more worth than a whole lake of little technical fry.

XXV

NARES' GLOSSARY

MY DEAR X,

I will offer no excuse for prattling about Robert Nares' Glossary (1822) in this letter. It is a book that should have Everyman's bacon and eggs spilt on it. I had the good fortune to come across the first edition of this invaluable repository of disused Elizabethan words on an East End bookstall. The biographies, encyclo-pædias, and books of reference have little to say about Nares (though a lengthy biography of his was, I believe, referred to by Macaulay) who, since practically every word contained in his quarto glossary has passed out of currency, bears, like Atlas, the weight of an entire language on his shoulders. He was obviously a man of vast industry, and he has quarried a multitude of quotations from very rare sources. He was too, one conjectures, a man of no humour, little imagination, and of a sceptical turn of mind. To Minshew's derivation of "gallimawfry," for instance, as a fry made for the maws (i.e. mouths) of slaves in the galleys, he replied, with inexorable gravity, "But this is mere stuff." Nor does he ever seem to be penetrated by the wonders, rarities, and oddities of the delightful world in which he wanders. His dedication to the King throws another light on his character :

"Under the auspices of Your Majesty, as Prince Regent, the former glory (i.e. of Elizabeth's reign) has been far surpassed ; and, of the latter, the most sanguine Expectations are fully authorized, by what is already known of the Talents, Taste, and Beneficence of King George the Fourth."

Over such a dedication it is only decent to draw the journalistic veil.

To quote one in a hundred of the rich and mellow words which are collected in the Glossary would need the space of a small volume. I can only pick out a few of the more engaging at haphazard. "Mumpsimus," for instance. It means "an old error in which men obstinately persevere." A story is supposed to have been told about it by Henry VIII. According to him, the word is taken from an ignorant monk who, in his breviary, had always said "mumpsimus" instead of "sumpsimus," and on being told of his mistake, said it might be so for all he knew, but "mumpsimus" was what he was taught and "mumpsimus" would he continue to say. Latimer uses the word in his "Sermons"—"Some be so obstinate in their old *mumpsimus*, that they cannot abide the true doctrine of God." Curiously enough it has tramped obstinately right into comparatively modern days. Lamb naturally would, and does, use it in his letters, but I met twice with this sturdy ancient in Thomas Hardy. It may survive in dialect, until we are once more a small nation. "Muckinder," again, was a jocular term for a handkerchief, with an obvious derivation. Ben Jonson uses it : "Be of good comfort, take my *muckinder* and dry thine eyes." Another "M" is "mum-budget," meaning "silent," and still surviving in "mum's the

word." Nares gives examples from the "Merry Wives" and "Hudibras." It is also used frequently in Mabbe's translation of Aleman's "The Rogue," where the old obsolete idioms have the time of their lives.

The Renaissance was a great and glorious age for finding terms of abuse for your enemy. Take "hoddy-peke," "a ludicrous term of reproach, generally equivalent to fool." It is perhaps derived from "hodmandod," which means a snail. It is used by Nash, Latimer, and in "Gammer Gurton's Needle." "Peeter" was a slang term for wine (Dekker explains it "a pottle of Greek wine"), which was abbreviated from "Peter-see-me," a term which presumably implied adulteration. So Beaumont and Fletcher :

"By old claret I charge thee,  
By canary I charge thee,  
By Britain, metheglin, and *peeter*  
Appear and answer me in meeter."

"Ephesian," again, (used in Henry VI) is a slang term for a toper. Steevens says that it is merely a "sounding" word, like "anthropophaginian," to "astonish Simple." Whether or no it is derived from the widow of Ephesus, who so speedily consoled herself, I do not know. "Flapse" and "Flibbergibbe" (a sycophant) are exceedingly rare terms of invective, which have not only dropped clean out of the language, but are, I think, only used once each in the whole range of English literature, the former by Alexander Brome and the latter by Latimer in his, shall I say, racy "Sermons." "Fustilarian" is as good as a blow, and "lungis," according to Minshew, "a slimme slow-

back, a dreaming gangrill, a tall and dull slangam that hath no making to his height, no wit to his making," is still better. Lastly, does anyone but the etymologist know that "giameux" (from old French gambeux) means "boots"? It was borrowed by Spenser from Chaucer's "Rime of Sir Topas": "His giameux were of quirboilly (boiled and softened leather)."

But it is far more exciting to trace the meanings of words which still cling precariously to the present. "Costermonger" is well rooted in tradition. It is derived of course from "costard (custard)-monger," a seller of apples. From that its meaning was extended to sharper and brawler, so much so that old Morose, in "Epicoene," is said to swoon at the voice of one. "Applesquire," another word for the same thing, had a still more unworthy connotation. "Zany" is interesting. Florio ("World of Words") says that "it is the name of John in some parts of Lombardy, but commonly used for a *silly John*, a simple fellow, a servile drudge, a foolish clowne in any comedy or interlude play." More probably it is a corruption of Giovanni. Dr. Johnson, on the other hand, derives it from "Sanese," a native of Siena, or, in other words, a fool! "Piccadilly," again, once the name of a famous ordinary built by one Higgins, a tailor, has a splendid longevity. It comes from "Piccadel" (Dutch—"Pickedillekens"), meaning a piece set round the edge of a garment, generally a collar. "Picots" (the same word), borders with little projections or turrets, are, I believe, fashionable to-day. "Tooth-pick," which Nares calls "this common and necessary implement," was more commonly "Pick-tooth," and was imported by travellers from Italy and France. It was frequently dis-

played, as a trophy or to mark an affected gentility, in the hat ! Sir Thomas Overbury thus arraigns a gallant in the pink of fashion : “ If you find him not heere, you shall find him in Paules, *with a pick-tooth in his hat*, a cape cloke, and a long stocking.”

To my pleasure, I think I have discovered through Nares the derivation of the slang “ tout,” from the verb to “ toot”—to pry or search. The tradesmen of Tunbridge Wells were wont to hunt out their customers on the road, on their arrival. Hence they were called “ tooters.” “ They are now, I believe,” says Nares, in all innocence, “ above such practices.” They come more surely to the door instead ! Dr. Johnson gives the same explanation for “ tooters,” and adds that Derbyshire beans are said to “ toot ” or to “ look up sharp.” Skeat gives “ project ” from the Danish “ toethoran.” “ Tout ” and “ toot ” are still used, I believe, in country dialect to express the upward thrust of sprouting vegetables. In an Elizabethan song-book—Weelkes’ “Airs and Fantastick Sprites”—I encountered the refrain, “ Toodle, loodle.” I leave it to you whether this genuine antique has anything to do with “ toot ” ; but let it be no longer arraigned as a purely modern colloquialism ! “ Giggle,” again, comes apparently from the Shakespearean “ giglot ” or “ giglet ” (“ Measure for Measure ”), and means a minx, a hussy, or “ wanton wench.” Fortune is a “ giglet ” in Cymbeline. I wonder whether “ jig ” in the nursery rhyme of Robin Redbreast is the same word—“ out upon you, fie upon you, bold-faced jig.” “ Bullion ” is curious. In the old sense it meant copper-plate set on the bridles of horses for display. Then colloquially it was a synonym for copper lace, tassels, or imitation gold

ornaments. Then, in a still more debased form, it meant finery used by shabby gamesters to attract the ingenuous. "Fast and Loose" has been handed down direct from the coney catchers. It was "a cheating game, whereby gipsies and other vagrants beguiled the common people of their money," and under its own name or its alternative "pricking at the belt or girdle," flourished well on into the nineteenth century. "Cat's-cradle" is derived, I fancy, from "cratch" (French—*crèche*), a manger. There was an old game called "scratch-cradle," in which a packthread was wound double round the hands into a rude semblance of a manger. "Cot-quean," which still faintly survives in dialect, is probably "cock-quean," or a male *quean*, a man "who troubles himself with female affairs." Ben Jonson and Addison use it in the sense of a *masculine hussy*, and in the seventeenth century its common meaning was a hen-pecked husband!

No wonder that our literature is the proudest in the world since the birth of Christ. No wonder that we found an Urquhart to match a Rabelais. The sound of our words has been like a host, like a sea, like "a wind on the heath."

## XXVI

### MODERN REALISTIC NOVELS

MY DEAR X,

On your coast of Coromandel you do not, I know read novels. Neither do you travel in Tubes and eat Grape-nuts. But we do : we cannot help ourselves. This tyrannic age forms certain habits for us, and in order to live we have to be planed down to its uniformity. So if I talk to you about novels, please understand that I am as a burning-glass, concentrating myself upon the indispensable things—as indispensable to the curriculum of life as food, air, sleep, light, collars, newspapers, orators and armaments. To write a novel is indeed the first scalp, the *toga virilis* of adolescence. A young man is hardly trousered without this initiation to life. It is simply the formula to the free-masonry of citizenship. Some men, of course, undergo the ceremony and then pass on to more genial occupations. Others make a career of it, putting out three novels a year, as they put in three meals a day. A good many of them are quite sensible about it and no more call attention to their custom than they would point out the varieties of food they had consumed a day. Others, as the old gentlemen

in clubs do about their meals, make a fuss and an advertisement about it. Indeed, had not the European War settled the problem of What To Do With Our Young Men, writing a novel might have been instituted as a substitute to learning the catechism.

But, in this letter, I am not going to discuss the average novel. No, I refer to the princelings who appear three or four times a year and bear brief literary insignia. Speaking generally, the characteristic of this fiction is the sense of the immediate, the momentary. It avoids the permanent and the universal almost deliberately. In a way the Wells-Bennett type of fiction that preceded it is responsible. Wells, for instance, grabbed all experience for his province. Unfortunately, he could make nothing else of it but a province. He plunged into the universal ocean of life, swam or rather splashed in it, and preserved a very definite consciousness, not of the water, but of his personality as a swimmer. He may, by his tremendous self-confidence and energy, have swum the Atlantic ; but it was not as a discoverer of anything but himself and the way he reacted upon that portion of the element in which he happened to be swimming. With Bennett (a more stable mind) the method has been different, but the results appreciably the same. In his novels he has selected a province of life ; but, unlike Wells, he has not confused himself with his little county of expression nor the county with the great territories of life outside it. But even he is not so very wise. He has attempted, by the utmost inquisitorial fidelity to the flora and fauna of his area (he is nothing if not scientific), by the sheer weight of microscopic and cumulative detail, to make his district of life represen-

tative of all the districts of life, whereas it is only representative of itself. He is a "realist," because he has exactly adapted his factual methods to a material in every way responsive to them. He is a "romanticist," because he presumes that such is the way of art. But it is no more than were the constitutions of the Abbé Sieyès a world-order. Personally, I infinitely prefer his *picaresque* exploits like "The Card." Here is invention, wit, sparkle, shrewdness, irony.

Let me glance for a moment at the younger generation\* and see to what extent they have inherited or disregarded these examples. The curious thing is that, excluding temperament, they are all very much alike. Pretty well all of them acknowledge a common law, toil in the same workshop, and use the same tools. The sum of this uniformity is, one is inclined to think, autobiographical. Now, this element need not commit them to a deliberate choice of material corresponding to their particular environment ; it need not imply either a personal memoir or self-absorption ; it need not implicate the writers in a conspiracy to thrust their personalities upon the world. It is at once more naïve and more complex. It means that, whatever their individual preferences or antipathies, their impulse is not an artistic but a personal one. They cannot express life in the terms of art, but only in terms of themselves. They meet themselves at every point ; they cannot get *outside* themselves. Their characters need not be replicas or projections of their creators' personalities ; but, having no objective

\* Written before the war, these remarks naturally apply to pre-war fiction, which overlapped into the war and even into the peace, but is visibly subsiding, to my mind, because of its obedience to a false principle of art.

impulse, they cannot but revolve within the orbit of those personalities. Shakespeare, it is true, created Hamlet and Jaques in his own image, but he did not do so at their expense. The life of Shakespeare is in them transfigured to a universal life, because Shakespeare, in the act of inspiration could not avoid contact with the synthesis "of man, of nature, and of human life." But this electrical fusion is absent altogether from the works of our contemporary young novelists. The subjective interest is their master; even in their most ambitious, most impersonal ventures it limits them to their own experience and drives them in on themselves. It is not powerful, not significant enough to identify them with the truths and realities (*not* the realisms) of life.

Another sign-post is the photographic tendency—exhibited not so much in the instinct to assimilate patiently and faithfully the exact lineaments of a social picture as in the habit of observing, describing, getting down upon paper the whole—and nothing less than the whole—of their material. They desire to absorb it, to inoculate it into the very corpuscles of their blood, in order to attain an overwhelming effect by the sheer density and quantity of their matter. There is no hedging or shelving the issue in this process. Its appeal is clear, positive, and candid, disdainful of half-lights, cross-purposes, or delicate shadings. It reminds one of Swinburne's method of criticism—swooping down on his man like a hawk, and bearing him away in a whir of the pinions of appreciation, regardless of proportions, regardless of discriminations and reticences. Swinburne does it romantically, our novelists realistically; but the result

is the same. We are not pierced by lightning, but borne to earth by the sheer impact of an iron thunderbolt. It is what Henry James called "the presentation of a huge, inauspicious amount"; but he was wrong, perhaps, in representing this accumulation of circumstantial evidence as an isolated phenomenon and as the fount of infelicity. It is, I think, the inevitable result of the autobiographical element obtruding upon the critical, the measuring, the selective faculty. I say nothing of inspiration for that is out of the question. The energy of an unconscious self-expression is too much for them. Like athletes, in the crisis of a race, they run themselves to a standstill, flinging out their vitality broadcast, helter-skelter. I will not labour the obvious point of how art, the balancing of refined and harmonized values, suffers from this eager stock-taking of relevant and irrelevant commodities. And it very often has the quaintest effect on the architecture of a novel. Many of the stories, after achieving a certain velocity, suddenly run off the lines and, incontinent, collapse. This evaporation of force betrays that lack of resource which is the retribution of, well—just plucking up the age in handfuls.

A natural result of this short-sighted policy is lack of composition. It is less disastrous because these novelists are young, and the fine choiceness of arrangement may perhaps come with maturity of experience. It is more pardonable because the conditions of contemporary art are without any tradition, any criterion of form. Criticism is at a discount, popular demand at a premium, and, socially, the age is in convulsions. How then can one expect the novel to acquire an orderly serenity?

But a more serious and radical defect is the lack of

style. A few go prospecting for style, and occasionally find it, but are not yet masters of their instruments or sufficiently out of the stage of experimentalism. But the rest are almost derelicts ; they seem to have no sort of feeling for expression. I don't mean style as an academic deportment, but as the nice adjustment of language to meaning. It isn't that they don't attempt style, but they treat it, not as an integral part of their material, but as a decoration—a plume in the bare hat of the good realist. But this decorative sense is not as a rule a meretricious one. It does not proceed from any relish for the art of bombinating *in vacuo*. No ; its clumsiness, its elaboration, its opaqueness are, I imagine, the result of this habit of swallowing a subject to the last mouthful, of cleaning the whole platter—not only the meat, but the bones, the gristle, the lumps of fat, and even the parsley. Our realists will not let alone.

The result is—what you might expect—chronic dyspepsia. There is indeed a Germanic efficiency (so closely allied to stupidity)—a coarseness—in this absorbed, boa-constrictor kind of attention to the material of their work. Everything is subordinate to it—ideas, imagination, creative form, even technical polish. Nothing must interfere with this primary element—observation. And observation, said Henry James, “is a second-rate thing—the precaution, the refuge of the small and timid. But to have the thing you mention and above all not to have imagination is simply not to have tact, than which nothing is more unforgiveable and more loathsome.” That is what this fanatical observation comes to—the closer you look at an object, the more its detail encroaches upon the whole, and the less likely you are to have tact.

Art, indeed, is the dispossessed deity. For these novels are not works of art, they are social documents, imaginary history, biology, or natural science. If our knight-errants of fiction were to observe a man waving his handkerchief from a bus, they would immediately set to work constructing his past history and relating it to his present action, or declaring how many times he waved it, or describing why and in what circumstances he waved it, or the colour of the handkerchief, or even the other occupiers of the bus, more probably the whole blessed lot—all out of their own preoccupations ; but never the significance, the total impression of the occasion or its kinship with the movements of objective life. So this fiction becomes more and more sectional, and less and less charged with the common purpose of universal ideas. It lives, not in the world, but in enclosures ; it tends to be psychological only within definite limits, and like certain parthenogenetic insects, to draw sustenance only from itself. It has nothing of the international appeal of Conrad, Hardy, Hudson ("Green Mansions," etc.), Mrs. Wharton in America, of Dostoievsky in Russia, or of Jules Romains, the author of that suggestive book "Mort de Quelqu'un," in France. It lives, to use the Bergsonian phrase, on a group-consciousness and not on a world-consciousness. It has very little of the passionate, vital, and epic inspiration generated by a broad, true, and objective attitude to life, and it is deplorably without any sense of self-criticism.

Of course these terminologies and logomachies of "realist" and "romanticist" mean very little. Too often they are the narcotics of criticism. A work of art is not bad because it is realist and good because it is

romantic. Still more futile is it to shuffle and sort literary epochs into this heading and that heading. As frequently as not, realism and romance co-exist in one period. But I fancy it is permissible to dub these novelists "realists," because theirs is the scientific method and the scientific method alone. And, inasmuch as their work is a kind of soft clay which, being pressed hard against the age, receives an impression of it, of its outside, the whole of its outside; so the characteristics of that work do reflect with a singular minuteness the two ostensible peculiarities of our generation to which I have, with fell intent, more than once called your attention—system on the one hand and confusion on the other. On the plane where passion and hatred meet, there are shamefully matched the extreme of system and the extreme of confusion. And not only does realism contain these two apparent contradictions within itself, but it is, in the same way and in its scientific aspect, to be placed in contrast with and in juxtaposition to the pseudo-picturesque.

You may think this a severe indictment, but fiction, if it is to become literature, must not be content to be examined merely by higher-certificate standards. It has, too, plenty of promise. Its earnestness and sincerity are unqualified. It has, more often than one would expect, something to say, and is very anxious to say it. And if I seem to be querulous about its defects it is because I love our English (not British) literature so deeply that I detest to see it floundering and being surpassed by that of nations who once could not hold a candle to it.

## XXVII

### ANOTHER NOVELIST

MY DEAR X,

Continuing these rather ponderous notes about the novel, I want in this letter to discuss Charles Marriott because his work represents so profound a reaction against the realistic novel, against fetching and carrying into print what our good realists would call things as they jolly well are. The realists won't let you keep this present at arm's length. Like the unfortunate Nun in "The Ingoldsby Legends," you are walled up in it.

Let us see to what extent Marriott's novels (his name you will not see in the pontifical announcements of literary dinners and ceremonies) are a protest against realism. There are two definite types of novel being written to-day in England—the popular type and the more ambitious type of the younger generation. Outside of these groups, there are a number of novelists who refuse to be classified and are inclined to look at the Here and Now with their heads on one side—Conrad and Belloc of course—Chesterton, Rose Macaulay (who has a bright eye), Miss Delafield, William Caine (for whom I have a large partiality), May Sinclair, Lord Dunsany, James Stephens, E. M. Forster (a very fine, subtle, profound,

and shamefully neglected novelist), and a few others I can't remember at the moment, work with paint and not a camera. But they will serve only to distract me.

I do not mean that Marriott says "yea and nay" for Yes and No, like Maurice Hewlett, and kicks the moderns into the mediæval melting-pot like Belloc and Chesterton. He is one with the realists, in prospecting in the soil of his own period. But, whereas they wield the hearty spade (and take vehement pains to call it so) in digging over the whole, and nothing less than the whole, of their particular little plots, he uses a divining-rod, not so much to discover what his own age looks like, as what it is *going* to look like. He paints, that is to say, not its face, but the expression of its face, and it is this expression which suggests its welcome to the future. He uses his divining-rod to discover to this generation those organic underground springs of its own soul, which will reveal the direction of its voyage into posterity.

One must be careful here of crystallizing his relation to the present into a formula. There is nothing whatever doctrinaire or propagandist in his work. What he does is to disintegrate the age into its component parts of nitrogen and oxygen, and to say to his audience, "Now, if you want life, which will you choose?" His purpose is the true artistic one of selecting, refining, and balancing the qualitative values of contemporary life. His remoteness from the Realists is explicit in this attitude alone. They absorb the territory that is nearest to them and most amenable to their purpose; he draws up a map of the relations between territories. Their conceptions being projected from their own personalities are only provincial; his, by interpreting contemporary life and

throwing it into perspective with abstract values, do embrace a synthesis, indicate a unified artistic purpose, and illustrate a coherent philosophy. They, by not discriminating between the surfaces and depths of things, between the external and the intimate, only express the surfaces and externals ; he, by realizing that the vital process is not to *observe* but to *see*, distinguishes between the realism of and the reality behind the appearance. Between them (with all respect to the realists) lies all the difference between the glutton and the epicure. Indeed how subtle, how unobtrusive he is in suggestion ! He does not plead or denounce or ratiocinate or even bear witness. He just, with a needle so delicate that few have seen it and so sharp it pierces without wound, *pricks the bubble*. The needle strikes, the bubble is pierced, and the great world rolls on. Everything and nothing are the same. The panes of the “dome of many-coloured glass” have slid open, but so silent that nobody has heard it, nobody felt the hot white rays on his head. But they have come through.

To get to the bottom of his art one must try and unravel his metaphysic. The way this metaphysic is worked out is by the objective presentment of a conflict. There is nothing novel about such a method ; it is as old as literature. He deals not so much with a psychological conflict as with a conflict of forces, or rather he closely implicates the two. To understand what this conflict means, what these forces represent, and, of greater artistic moment, how his characters react upon the forces and the forces upon his characters, the novels which reflect this tendency must be glanced at more or less in the order of their evolution. For Marriott did not by any means

jump to the final recruitment of his contrasts in a bound. He often *recula pour mieux sauter*. His earlier novels, too, sometimes exploit a deliberate mannerism which greatly impairs their lucidity. You feel there is something working obscurely behind their idiosyncrasies, but you cannot altogether make out what it is. In *The Column*, for instance, he throws his conflict into relief, by using a clumsy, almost occult kind of symbolism, which only betrays his inability to achieve his purpose without it. He has never quite discarded this central supporting motive, but he has made, in his later books, far more natural play with it by drawing the threads of conflicting forces together, not upon a symbolized idea such as *The Column* but upon a symbolized person such as Gregory Pinfold in *Now*; by concentrating the chorus in a single personality. Indeed one of the most remarkable things in Marriott's novels is the emergence of this idea of conflict out of an undergrowth of allusion, figurative experiment, circumlocution, and empiricism.

And in most of these earlier books—*Genevra* (1904), *The Kiss of Helen* (1908), *When a Woman Woos* (1909), *The Lapse of Vivien Eady* (1906), and others—his characters are not allowed to move on their own axis, to unfold their own destinies. The ferment of his ideas either upsets them and exposes them to capricious and mechanical motives of action or their human interest is sacrificed to the abstract element of conflict. It is not they who produce the conflict, but the conflict that produces them. To give the two sets of ideas room, the characters are grouped together into general types and enrolled under a banner. But there are two exceptions to so easy a generalization. *The Wondrous Wife* appears to me sheer

false sentiment, while *The Intruding Angel* with the wronger playing the wronged to herself and so accepted by the world, set over against the wronged whose magnanimity to the wronger is his own defeat and the world's censure—gives forth the finest savour of an original, penetrating irony.

Curiously enough, most of the later novels underline this tendency to subordinate the individual to the generic symbol he or she represents. The reason is, I think, because the conflict, implicit and experimental in the earlier novels, emerges at last in full panoply. Contemporary life has at length split into two parts, and the principles governing them have become at once more definite and more generalized. In *The Catfish*, *The Dewpond*, and particularly in *Subsoil* one begins to see exactly what Marriott is driving at. Under various disguises, in different manifestations, it is one and the same thing—"the queer, unpleasant, disturbing touch of the kingdom of heaven." Here, it is the unfettered rights of personality as opposed to the limitations imposed upon it by special class distinctions. In another place, it is the man of convictions warring against the man of affairs. Here it is the man who sees against the man "who can only observe and reason." Again, it is the disquieting and practical idealist piercing the shams of the romantic illusionist. Elsewhere it is the abstract idea of "the universal, the unexplained, and the forbidden" menacing the particular, the theories according to the law, but not according to the prophets, the accepted of every-day shifts and expedients. Again, it is life driven by inspiration as against life directed by system. In *Subsoil*, a novel about painting, it is original reality taking arms against

decorative and academic "glibness." Again, it is the practical artist seceding from the sentimental opportunist directing his energies into the channels of vested interests. In *The Dewpond* it is natural morality extricating itself from forced morality. In *The Catfish* it is spontaneous impulse triumphing over the ulterior motive. Always, directly and indirectly, it is the spirit wrestling with the letter—free human life watered from the inner springs of consciousness fighting for its freedom, its humanity and its life against those principles that have stolen its birthright and ringed it round in a citadel of institutions. All through the battlefield of the novels these forces, with man's and woman's unconquerable or conquered mind for ally, wage their tireless and world-old strife, printing the destinies of posterity. The only analogy is a recurrent theme in a symphony. But never, in the later novels, are these forces set in crude battle array. That is my doing: Marriott simply divines them in men's souls. All he does is to make you feel that these forces are the true ones. The souls battle it out between one another by night, so to speak, as souls do. If this is not true art, I have read Marriott with my eyes shut.

I forbear going further into the complex and subtle play of ideas in *Subsoil*, *The Catfish*, and *The Unpetitioned Heavens*; *Davenport* (the latest in point of time) is rather different. It deals with an evasive and intangible motive—precisely the kind of subject-matter in which his subtle methods of divination are most at home. But the whole thing is rather a brilliant *tour de force* than a creative fabric reared by invisible hands. An uncommon situation gathers the actors together and our interest is in watching how they take it and what it does for them.

We are not enlisted—all unknowingly—in the War of the Angels as we are in the other novels. Davenport is the transcendental personality of Harry Belsire. Harry is a perfectly normal young man of a candid disposition, of social qualities, and decent impulses, an employee in a respectable firm of photographic reproducers. But he is also the possessor of a "dual personality," his *alter ego* being the mystical Davenport, a kind of inspired prophet of human brotherhood, of that synthesis in human relationship with which Marriott's novels are so often concerned.

As in all instances where the genuine artist is at work, the characters write their own and each other's biographies; their creator is merely a spectator in their evolutions. Nor is Marriott's mature skill any the less acute in his treatment of the central scheme. He has not quite achieved the triumph of art over his material. But, consider its complications! Consider the intricacy necessary for suggesting a philosophy of actual life, of human conflict, and of what I may call superconsciousness, while at the same time avoiding the commonplace appeal of occult-mongering. As an example of sheer virtuosity the way in which Marriott preserves his non-committal and sceptical attitude towards occultism and opens avenues of potential illumination by stating the facts and not the theories, is remarkable. He keeps his head steadily in a region where anybody might be excused for losing it. And he handles his enterprise, vast in its metaphysical scope, with a dexterity which, in these days of inchoate and prodigal literature, prodigal as to means rather than end, is admirable.

*Now* should have been considered first. This novel is

the tilting-field for the combat of the many who stand for something with the few who have nothing to lose. The protagonists on the one side are the family of the Kenwyn-Browns : "the intelligently smiling vanguard, with a 'we're all right' expression, of an immense army, spreading darkly and decreasing in intelligence to the rear, of people of all kinds and conditions, the bulk, in fact, of the inhabitants of these islands. This army represented something that had been carried about as far as it would go ; it would produce nothing finer than the Kenwyn-Browns." On the other side are the people who have "dropped out," who, with nothing to lose and with no ulterior motive, have deserted from the darkly spreading army of official and hall-marked civilization. Behind the severely concrete struggle of personalities you can hear, as in a delicate shell, the surge and thunder of the larger humanities. *Now*, indeed, reminds me of the sweet and profound serenity of the child in Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* saying to our spell-bound community, "Why, you've got nothing on." Yet I have only touched this extraordinary novel with my finger-tips. I have not mentioned Morrison, the mysterious leader of the people who had "dropped out," the German Jew who is indeed a Hidden Hand and yet a wonderfully first-hand piece of character-drawing. How readily would not the second-hand artist have made him dramatic, salient, and oppressive. Instead, he is both a man and a mystical sympathy. I know nothing in all modern fiction to touch Morrison unless it be Mrs. Wilcox in *Howard's End*. Nor have I more than alluded to the profound significance of the "withdrawal" motif in *Now*, a motif which, if we really think about it,

embraces the whole of Christianity and actually creates the foundation of a new synthetic philosophy of ethics and social life.

I must say a few words as to the possible causes of Marriott's lack of popularity in England. That his positive revolt from the commercial type of novel, and his difficult office of interpreting life in its fourth-dimensional terms, must secure him only a limited appreciation, is obvious. But there are, I think, other reasons. You cannot "place" his work, and the public, that submits to being led by the nose, likes to know where it is. His master in the indicative method of writing is Henry James. His recognition of the supreme philosophy of love, joy and youth, his determination to pierce through the crust of social life into the genuine realities and his frank welcome to the earth (Cornwall is the spiritual foster-mother of nearly all his novels) to some extent cast the Meredithian toga upon him. But his work is really totally different from Meredith's glittering egoism. Then again his method of construction is heterodox. Its close correspondence to the theme and its elimination of waste are more acceptable in France than in England. His cumulative manner again, the way in which he throws the whole weight of his books into the climax is apt to disconcert (justifiably in the earlier novels) the impatient reader. Lastly, there is a curious lack of personality in his style. It is not amenable to extracts because there is nothing of passionate virility to quote. His style is sunk in his material and his ideas. And in its subordination to the absolute demands of his artistic purpose there is perhaps an affinity to his theories (*vide Subsoil*) of restraining and enlarging the functions of the artistic

impulse to a corporate rather than an individual significance. At any rate, the result is a high level of workmanship and a disciplined presentment of the many things he has to say.

## XXVIII

### ON THE ELIZABETHANS AND OURSELVES

MY DEAR X,

I divine that you are a little impatient at the way I thrust the Elizabethans, Jacobeans, and Carolines in front of your nose; you complain that with Lamb, Hartley Coleridge, Carew Hazlitt, Swinburne, Symonds and others ahead of me I might show a little more originality. I feel you observe with justice that I hardly mention the Middle Ages or the nineteenth century. So that I suppose you are inclined to expect an apology. Well I have no syllogisms or ratiocinations to present you. I have hardly analysed the matter myself. It is partly because I collect books and like 'em old and rare. It is partly because I am intrigued by the period, its enthusiasms, discoveries, pedantry, crudities, quaintnesses, strength, sweetness, terrors, furies, ecstasies, youth, gravity, penetration, literary passion, zest, merriment, plain-spokenness, labyrinths of thought, curiosities, naïvetés, freshness, freakishness, fandangoes—yes, even its excesses, puerilities, archaics, grotesqueries, and stuffiness. I like the old people personally, and there is an end of it.

Then again, I think that in spite of the scholarship and pains devoted to them, they are still an unfamiliar,

if not an unknown quantity in literature. Text-books still repeat old fallacies and shibboleths about them ; still call the author of "Nimphidia" a dullard and Burton's closely knit medical treatise a thing of shreds and patches —fallacies as foolish in their way as Arnold's "ineffectual angel" stuff upon the author of "The Masque of Anarchy" ; an age which prefers Quick Returns, Business-like Results, and tinned Knowledge, has no use for anything but their names.

Yet I confess another reason for my allegiance is their remoteness. "Hey nonny no"—how distant, how strange, how incomprehensible, how appealing ! As a factory girl goes to a Lyceum melodrama, so I to them—to escape from the intolerable pressure of Now—I hatch myself out of the egg of the present, that slays the spirit with the flesh, that is the victim of the Dance of Death, not of skeletons, but clangling and maddened machines—to escape from a democracy that is cajoled, swindled and coerced by an incompetent bureaucracy for which it toils and clamours, and from an autocracy of quacks, demagogues, money-hunters, and muddlers that treats the democracy as it almost deserves to be treated. Anguish of the present, in which the spirit is the shrivelled babe that rides upon the blast !

Yet are we so different from the Elizabethans ? I quote Camden :

" All things runne round, and as the seasons of the yeare, so men's manners have their revolutions. . . . Our age is not onely faulty, our ancestors have complained, we complaine, and our posterity will complaine, that manners are corrupted, and naughtinesse raigneth, and all things waxe worse and worse. But those things doe stay and shall stay, onely tossed a little to

and fro, even as the billowes of the sea. In one age there will be more adulterers, in another time excessive riot in banqueting, another while strange garmenting of the body, not without deformity of the minde. . . . There will be alwaies tyrants, murderers, thieves, adulterers, extortioners, church robbers, traitours, and others of the same rabblement."

This grave reproof to his contemporaries for their extravagant apparel may serve as well for ours for the lack of it. Yet we English must have travelled some road, even if to an undiscovered bourn, from our Elizabethan ancestors, since it is incredible that, say, Harrison, who wrote "*The Description of Britayne*" in Holinshed's "*Chronicles*" of 1577, would have understood why we talked, dressed, drove, worked, played, built, learned, fought, and wrote as we actually do. What is it then that differentiates one age from another?—a trick of dress, a trick of thought, a trick of looking at the world, discarded habits of moralizing? Would the Elizabethans looking at us shudder or rejoice? Do we look at them with our curious confusion of emotions—eagerness, regret, curiosity, impatience, patronage, virtuosity, pride, dutifulness—because Shakespeare has penetrated to the suburbs, because old has a sneaking regard for the caperings of youth, or because they were the first to unbolt the gates for the entry of that uncertain monster, Modernism, half-angel and half-brute?

For do not forget that theirs was the key. Patriotism was invented in 1588; the Church accomplished her final compromise; the State was realizing its concept of sovereignty; the world stretched its confines nearly as far as they could go; the earth began to revolve about the sun (John Dee, who captured Elizabeth's interest if

not her purse, accepted the Copernican theory) ; houses were built with windows and not loopholes ; heraldry was becoming a badge-selling scandal (Sir William Segar granted a coat to the common hangman) ; tobacco was sold at 5s. the oz. (about 30s. in our money), and there were 7000 shops which sold it in London ; the woodcut and the black-letter book were capitulating to the engraving and Roman type ; Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood, while the moon was still ruling the destinies of "Abraham" men and coneycatchers ; enclosures and the break-up of the manorial system sent countrymen to the towns on that long pilgrimage which to this day has its stragglers ; men in antic dress ate with silver spoons from silver platters, and the Countess of Salisbury spent £14,000 (old style) on the hangings of her lying-in chamber ; disorderly slums ("Dwell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasure ? If it be no more, Portia is Brutus's harlot, not his wife") crept about the skirts of London ; Shakespeare wrote problem plays, Middleton and Dekker realistic ones ; Nash, Dekker and Greene were the first novelists and journalists. The commercial system began to rear its ugly head.

Perhaps that is why the excitement of the Elizabethan period is at once so unique and appeals to the modern so strongly. There is something more than the astonishing volume, zest, and virility of its literature. If we leave out the eclipsing planet Shakespeare, the literature of the seventeenth century between Donne and Dryden, as I suggested in a former letter, in point of maturity of thought, spiritual discovery, philosophic range and ambition, appears even more remarkable. With conscious uniformity, extended to every department of life and

letters, the Elizabethans kicked away the leaky football of the mediæval world. Only a splendid ignorance of what it was doing and what was in store for its descendants could have given it that exuberant sense of confidence and security. In this respect, the Elizabethan age proper was unique and self-contained as no subsequent period has ever been. Such uniformity and assurance could not but be ephemeral. The whole character changes after 1605–1610 in a way that has not been sufficiently noted. The drunken gambols of James I's Court are a brilliant parody upon the Mercutio-like sprightliness of Elizabeth's; both Marston and Kyd belonged to the “transpontine” and “revenge” school of drama; but there is all the difference, less in expression than in feeling, between the satiric ferocity of “Antonio's Revenge” and the naïve pleasure in the extravagance of violence in the “Spanish Tragedy”—the same difference on another plane as that between “Romeo and Juliet” and “Antony and Cleopatra.” Such a transformation is very far from being an eclipse—literature gains in power what it loses in freshness—but the first fine careless rapture which we feel for thirty years from 1575 onwards can never be replaced.

Creation works from within outwards, and the difference between ourselves and the Elizabethans is not only the difference between a petticoat and a farthingale. We eat, drink, and sleep as they did; but for the loss of many fine, snorting, caparisoned words, and for certain modifications of fashion in vocabulary and pronunciation, we speak the same language. But we do not think the same thoughts, we do not even breathe the same air. Take the Irish Rebellion of the late sixteenth century

and that of the early twentieth. Both were implacably suppressed; both had their aftermath of impolitic executions. But our world, unlike Elizabeth's, feels itself obliged to vindicate its conduct and explain its instincts. We can unravel, but we cannot feel the meaning of that objective and impersonal spirit, beautiful even in its ugly patches, which made Drayton, Constable, Daniel, and Sidney write exquisite sonnets to the mistresses whom they loved and on account of whom they suffered, as if they were Elysian abstractions. Their Ideas, Dianas, Delias, and Stellas would mean something to us personally; for the poets, for their actual passions, they meant more to the common literary devotion.

So you see this sense of remoteness is not inconsistent with what we may learn from a period of "splendid isolation." How is this? What use can the Elizabethans be to us, who commonly pay a visit to them as we do to the museum of a provincial town in the break of a journey? In what manner can their example be profitable to us? Get rid, for a moment, of the usual appeals; the antiquarian interest is for some, the historical for others. The written thought of the period, all of it that has survived as literature and become a part of tradition, that—though its peculiarities arrest it at a definite barrier of time—cannot, by its permanent contribution to the spirit of life, be earmarked in time. Take away, for a moment, the "spacious days" formula; take away even the glowing, ruddy human element. Scale away all the Jingo glamour and tinsel and look at the period, not in the light of a congeries of literary men but simply as a single illuminated page in the breviary of generations. I believe that still two unfading excellencies are left to our perusal. In the

first place the extraordinary hospitality accorded to the literary idea. That literary men starved even more easily than they do now makes no difference. That does not mean that letters were at a discount, but that there existed profiteers who took pecuniary advantage of a work of national importance. For then the love of letters did not belong to the streets alone, or the study alone, or the palace alone, or to God alone. It was as common as blackberries. In the second place the passion for life. It was not at all a spiritual passion ; it did not even express itself in a respect for life. It was an appetite, a gluttony, even an exploited sensation. But just because many sins were committed for life's sake, many cruelties, follies and vanities, yet they are to be forgiven because they were done for life's sake. Such passion, perverted as it was, because it was not spiritual, because it did not therefore respect the life both of man and beast, is yet a feather in the national cap ten thousand times more glorious than possessions. The Jacobean age, as I suggested, is different. It is far less remote, and we are certainly touched by it more nearly.

Perhaps in the future, when wars and hates and hypocrisies are not of such social and political expedience as they are now, humanity will do something with its new habit of explaining and justifying. Till then let who will escape from it without reproach. Thus wrote Meredith on the stars :

“ So one may read and little find them cold :  
Not frosty lamps, illumining dead space,  
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.  
The fire is in them whereof we are born.”

I wonder what our successors will think of us two hundred years ahead. No doubt they will make those classifications and reservations it is so difficult for us to make. Perhaps they will look down the incline of history and find the barometer of general happiness affected only by the climatic disturbances of business, politics and publicity. There is so profound a cleavage between these external phenomena and sheer human nature. I am sure that in its heart and head this nature is sick of being ruled. But it is fearful of being let go ; such a loss, it curiously feels, will be the loss of its self-importance ; without them its affairs (mysterious fetish) would fall to pieces. It will not take a prolonged rest-cure from Money, Power and the Officiating Cleric who celebrates the nuptials of the twain. Humanity in mufti—a golden ideal ! Yes, it would be a pleasant thing to ride out of the Tabard Inn and tell tales as far as Canterbury ; to consort with humanity at last purely and naturally interested in itself.

But this is the twentieth century and politics began before the first. In spite of all, it is an absurdity and even a treachery to wish oneself elsewhere. After all, I should not like to have a nerve killed by an Elizabethan dentist. I should not like to be cudgelled for “ taking the wall ” of a passer-by in the street. I would rather read a bad novel even than a Puritan explosion against the stage. I do not want to fight duels with the authors I have reviewed. A few friends, books, amenities, pleasantries, enough money to live on and satisfy a moderate taste, no newspapers, no servitude, and a world not tearing itself to pieces, business affairs transacted in an hour per annum, humanity suffering not the tragedies of political

accident but (if it must have them) of its own being, letters old and new honoured, Nature no longer violated, people smiling, children fat, songs and music, no financiers, silent politicians, decent buildings, good food and drink for all, numberless birds, no sportsmen or scientists or wars or lawyers or profits, fewer clamourers and charlatans, and, lord ! this would be the best of all possible ages for a man to live in.

## XXIX

### A BELATED ELIZABETHAN

MY DEAR X,

My dispersed remarks about the Elizabethans have again put my nose to the bookish trail. Know you Lillo—George Lillo—the dramatist of the eighteenth century and the only romantic dramatist of our literature who still remains a suppliant to fame? Fate, accident have “covered all” his literary deeds “with those two narrow words, *Hic jacet.*” His life need concern us little. He was born in 1693, and carried on the business of a jeweller in Moorfields (the Elizabethan resort, as “The Alchemist” puts it, of beggars, lepers and coneycatchers) until his death in 1739. Before the publication of his collected works in the middle of the century, the only and very defective account of him was in Colley Cibber’s *Lives*. The “Life” in the collected edition adds little to Cibber, except to deny the legend of his death in extreme penury. Throughout, he seems to have lived the inconspicuous and uneventful life of a respectable tradesman, with play-writing only as an interlude or recreation from a prosperous career. Another edition of his plays was published in 1810, but that was the terminus at which he has remained ever since. Except in Bell’s *British Theatre* (whose plays are merely reprints of bowdlerized

and prompt-book copies) and possibly a volume or two of miscellaneous plays, to the best of my knowledge none of his work has been published in any subsequent collection of old plays, and no criticism of him (except the briefest of notes in encyclopædias and their kind) has ever been attempted.\* His only pyramid is a mound of invidious dust.

George Lillo (Chambers calls him "William") wrote eight plays—*Silvia, The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnewell, The Life of Scanderbeg, The Christian Hero, The Fatal Curiosity, Marina, Elmerick, and Arden of Feversham*. *Silvia* is an extremely stilted exercise in the style of the average musical piece of the period written by scores by Bickerstaffs and other dramatists, which Lillo calls "A Pastoral Burlesque Serio-Comic Opera" and I a Fustiano-Opera-Bouffe. *The Life of Scanderbeg* (the title no doubt is taken from the lost old play of "Scanderbege") is an adaptation of "Tamberlaine" in the style of Restoration heroic drama. *The Christian Hero* is—"The Christian Hero," worse even than Rowe; *Marina* is a lugubrious attempt to rewrite *Pericles*, and I never got any further than the first ten lines of *Elmerick*.

There remain three survivors, of which Fielding thought so well that he put on *The Fatal Curiosity* at the Haymarket in 1736, when he was manager there. This is not the only instance of his discernment, but it is surely the most remarkable. For the exciting thing about "George Barnwell," "Arden of Feversham," and

\* Since this letter was written, a study of Lillo has, I believe, been included in a book by Professor W. H. Hudson. I have not had the opportunity of reading it.

“The Fatal Curiosity” is that they no more belong to the eighteenth century than did the “Songs of Innocence.” Lillo, too, did not come at the tired end of a period. Surely, to say the least, it is one of the “curiosities of literature” that a comfortable jeweller, revolving in the hub of an epoch rolling sedately and deliberately many, many leagues from the Renaissance, should have written three tragedies which can barely be distinguished from the Elizabethan drama. What an odd *aperçu* he suggests, as the quiet tradesman, beguiling his leisure with old plays—he must have saturated himself in them! It is a phenomenon similar to that of Charles Wells and Beddoes in the nineteenth century—and more interesting, partly because the nineteenth century was less remote in feeling from the Elizabethans, and partly because Lillo is still damp with the waters of Lethe. But a phenomenon quite out of nature is that the other plays do not exhibit so much as a grain or atom of his Elizabethan qualities. They are typically bad eighteenth-century plays. Talk of dual identity!

*Arden of Feversham* is the most curious example of this incongruity. The anonymous old play (published in 1592) was attributed to Shakespeare, and Goethe, with his usual complacence, adjudicated it to Shakespeare’s youth. I can hardly believe that he had ever read it, because its obvious characteristic is a maturity of style, passion and dramatic insight (in patches) totally unlike Shakespeare’s earlier experiments. At any rate what Lillo did was to recast the old Arden, retaining the characters (even to their names), the plot, and, in numerous instances, almost an identity of phrase. I defy any but the trained expert to tell by internal evidence

which was written in 1592 and which in 1736. There are differences, but only of structure and psychology. As far as construction is concerned, Lillo's is the better play. The old Arden, like many of its brethren, is a play of sporadic magnificence in poetic intensity, wealth of diction, and human intuition ; Lillo's Arden is less brilliant, better balanced, more closely knit and unified. Also, in deflecting the psychology of Alice Arden, who in the old play conspires with Mosby to murder her husband, Lillo has made one striking improvement. He causes Arden's goodness of heart to make "Alicia" ashamed of her intrigue with Mosby and, in a scene of quiet beauty, to become reconciled with her husband. But Lillo keeps her character weak and vacillating as from the beginning. When Mosby and his bravoes break in and murder Arden her initiative is paralysed. This sure dramatic treatment both complicates and intensifies the emotional reaction of Alicia after her husband's death. The parallel of Alicia, in the Elizabethan drama, is in fact Mrs. Frankfort in Heywood's "A Woman Killed with Kindness."

"George Barnwell," which, it is said, drew more tears from the audience than all "the rant of *Alexander the Great*," is not such a dramatic achievement as the other two. It is written in a heavyish prose which—an important point—veils blank verse and exhibits only one figure of large interest—a figure of perverted greatness exactly in the lofty, generous manner of the Elizabethan super-egoists. That figure is Millwood, the woman, the giantess who twists Barnwell to her will and tempts him to his utter ruin. There is a grand scene where Millwood turns upon her pursuers and burns their hypocrisy and

pretentiousness in words like red-hot coals. In that scene she is transformed from a common adventuress to a "tragedy queen."

But Lillo's dramatic apogee is "The Fatal Curiosity," in which Old Wilmot and Agnes his wife, driven to the breaking point of misery and destitution, murder the rich stranger who sleeps under their roof, unknowing that he is their son. It is a terrific piece of work, more like a typhoon than a play. But it is a managed, a directed, a controlled typhoon. And, piercing through the almost tangible darkness that envelops it, one is aware of a sound quality of workmanship. The divergent motives of Agnes and Old Wilmot are well contrasted. Agnes is at odds with her environment, personally and on behalf of her husband; Old Wilmot's passion is abstract—he is at odds with the universe. How true a reading of the masculine and feminine attitude! Crabb Robinson, who saw Mrs. Siddons play Agnes in 1797, tells us that he became so hysterical that he was all but turned out of the theatre in the idea that he was laughing by intention. I can well believe him. Here are a few passages:

When Agnes and Old Wilmot are fighting a psychological duel previous to the murder :

AGNES.    "Barbarous man!  
Whose wasteful riots ruin'd our estate,  
And drove our son, ere the first down that spread  
His rosy cheeks spite of my sad presages,  
Earnest entreaties, agonies and tears,  
To seek his bread amongst strangers, and to perish  
In some remote, inhospitable land;  
The loveliest youth, in person and in mind

That ever crown'd a groaning mother's pains !  
 Where was thy pity, where thy patience then ?  
 Thou cruel husband, thou unnat'ral father !  
 Thou most remorseless, most ungrateful man,  
 To waste my fortune, rob me of my son ;  
 To drive me to despair and then reproach me  
 For being what thou'st made me."

"Down, down, my swelling heart," says Old Wilmot in another passage. "Down, thou climbing sorrow, down ! Hysterica Passio," groans Lear. When Old Wilmot first hears that he has killed his son :

"Prithee, peace :  
 The miserable damn'd suspend their howling,  
 And the swift orbs are fixt in deep attention."

When he has reaped the full discovery :

"Compute the sands that bound the spacious ocean,  
 And swell their number with a single grain ;  
 Increase the noise of thunder with thy voice ;  
 Or when the raging wind lays nature waste  
 Assist the tempest with thy feeble breath ;  
 Add water to the sea and fire to Etna  
 But name not thy faint sorrow with the anguish  
 Of a curst wretch who only hopes for this  
(Stabbing himself)  
 To change the scene, but not relieve his pain."

Here, at least, is the echo of the great old days.

I do not want to claim too much for him. Hardly more than a minor, he is still very interesting as a kind of "sport" in his age. Nor is he unlike the Elizabethans in their somewhat rancid taste for domestic crime alone.

Of course there are differences. He does not possess their romantic feeling or turn for figurative expression. But the texture and cadence of their blank verse are his : their power of extracting full-blooded and passionate speech out of a good or bad situation is his. Lillo is sometimes Byronic : so were the Elizabethans. He possesses their throb, their volcanic energy, their amplitude and bravery. Something too of their curious and intense exploration of human corruption is his—a symptom of that revulsion from the light-heartedness and cheerful patriotism (beloved of modern old gentlemen) attributed to the strictly Elizabethan period.

### XXX

#### ON CANT

MY DEAR X,

In an era which has deluged us with seas of blood and drowned us in oceans of rhetoric, I am inclined to write you a short letter about cant—the word of God in the mouth of the Prince of Flies. You know as well as I do the thousand and one little contrivances patented in this age for setting poor humanity on his legs again. Compulsory examination of the “unfortunate class” (*verè infelices!*) ; state capitalism ; conscription of the undesirables in lunatic asylums ; Impropriety Leagues ; Societies for the Endowment of Wars for the Emancipation of the Human Race ; Committees for Propagating the Basic Truth of the Happiness of Death—you know all about them, you know, you know. But I confess I have little hope for the future unless I can discern some public feeling towards a Society for the Detection of Cant. No deviltry is more insidious, more demoralizing, more triumphant, and more secure. The whole epic of human endeavour may be bowdlerized by a single cant phrase in the margin. Cant is old and young, older than the legend of the wolf who cozened Red Riding Hood—or (better) the wolf that drank higher up than the sheep—and younger than this morning’s newspaper poster. But take

it for all in all—as the Pandarus of the revolting angels and the pen of the latest advertising agent, we shall not (in this generation) see its like, I hope, again.

The first step was to look up “cant” in the dictionary. Nares says: “A corrupt dialect used by beggars and vagabonds”; Dr. Johnson: “A particular form of speaking peculiar to some certain class or body of men.” But cant in our day is a particular form not of speech but of *thought*. The former is jargon, very often the instrument, the handmaiden of cant, but by no means its primum mobile or mark of identification. Ultimately indeed jargon is meaninglessness—a circumvention of expressing the idea. As such, it is a puny, neutral, Blifilian, Pecksniffian vice, achieving its mean ends by periphrasis and evasion. Cant, on the other hand, is a positive and aggressive dishonesty, using and discarding its familiar jargon as a lord his underling. Jargon is speech, but cant is thought.

But Nares is right enough in his historical way; he is defining cant, not morally or intellectually, but as a specific and obsolete idiom current only in the Renaissance. “The Canting Crew” were an illicit commonwealth which time has ferried over Lethe with all his other second-hand baggage of empires. Ben Jonson and all the artists of his age interpret cant in this confined sense. A passage from “The Staple of Newes”:

“ . . . A Rogue,  
A very Canter, I, sir,  
One that maunds (i.e. begs)  
Upon the pad.”

Now this constricted application has a certain validity

of its own. But only if the word be traced to the perversion of its origin. The derivation of cant in fact is *chant*, and secondarily but more closely by etymology —*canticle*. The meaning of a canticle, I suppose, is a hymn of praise to God, or, in other words, praise in its ultimate, purest, and most intense significance. Man, life, spirit, the universe are, therefore, in this sense a canticle—symbols of the accomplished fact, one and indivisible, of creation. They praise because they are. From the loins of so holy a first parent was Cant, who slew his brother Abel, born into the world.

How then did the young life of cant fall into bad company? What song did the Sirens sing, and who feathered the shaft that wounded Philoctetes? I can only suggest an illustration. When the narrow rod of human institutions began to measure and partition the divine inheritance, the cosmic theatre of worship became a church, the song of praise, Hymn No. 896. Man consciously went to church in order to sing canticles. Some men went to praise God, but some men went because other men did, because church-going was a means to the favour of the community, because they wanted to be Mayors and Bailiffs and Captains and Church-wardens and Governors and Presidents and Head-Grocers and Politicians. The eighteenth-century people used definitely to go to church to attract the attention of prospective husbands or wives. Richardson wrote a *Rambler* for Dr. Johnson, in which he recommended the practice to young women on this ground, and the article so captivated its readers that the number had to be reprinted. Thus designed men other than they professed, other than they desired to profess to their neighbours, other than their

neighbours *believed* they professed. Thus was canticle clipped of its tail. Thus was incubated the Ulterior Motive. Let not thy right hand see . . .

"The Canting Crew," therefore, were legitimate descendants of the ulterior motive. They invented a language which only they could understand, and they palmed one off on the public, calculated to a nicety of experiment and trial to accomplish the purpose of its deceit. Harman's scientific disclosures in "A Caveat for Common Cursetors" are evidence enough that shibboleths were patented and tabulated by the vagabonds as methodically as in a Bill on the Statute Book. Here are some of the kinds of rogue enumerated by Harman—*Swadder* (pedlar), *Jarke Man* (forger of passports), *Patrico* (a priest who takes "lechery for no sin"), *Fresh Water Mariners* (who counterfeit great losses on the sea), *Ruffler*, *An Upright Man* (another sort of the "ranging rabblement of rascals"), *A Prigger of Prancers*, *Palliards* (otherwise called Clapper-Dudgeons—most of 'em Welshmen!), *Dummerers* (who counterfeit dumbness—most of 'em Welshmen—impossible!), *Walking Morts* (grass-widows who pretend to be real). Here are a few of the rogues' slang terms—*Alybbeg* (bed), *Bynge a waste* (get you hence), *Carsan* (cheese—from Low Latin), *Chattes* (gallows), *Crashing-Chetes* (teeth), *Darkemans* (night—see Middleton's "Roaring Girl"), *Dewse a vyle* (the country), *Glasyers* (eyes) (old Proverb—"Your father wasn't a glazier," meaning "you are standing in the light"), *Margeri Prater* (hen), *Wase* (drunken), *Param* (milk), *Poppelars* (porridge—plural in Scotch), *Proctuor* (a "keeper of a spital-house—a liar"), *Quier luffin* (a J.P.), *Quaromes* (a body—probably a corruption of the begin-

ning of a burial prayer), *Tannam* (bread—panem). Here is a sentence : “ So maye we happen on the harmans and dye the Jarke or to the guyerkyn and shower guyer crampings and so to trining on the chates ” (So we may chance to sit in the stocks, either be whipped, either had to prison home, and there be shackled with bolts and fetters, and to hang on the gallows.) Many of these words are no doubt derived from the old British pre-Saxon language. Many of them probably survive to-day in disreputable quarters. But cant itself has become as reputable as a church. The rogues used ointments, plasters, salves, bandages and crutches to lure the public’s faith in their bodily infirmities. Here is one of the ordinances of the craft in the Spanish rogue-novel “ Guzman ” (robustly translated by James Mabbe, the Elizabethan) :

“ We will and command, that no man discover the secrets and mysteries of our trade, nor divulge and publish them abroad, save only to those that are Professors of the said Art. And he that shall invent or finde out any new trick or cunning device for the common good, shall be bound to manifest the same to the incorporation of beggars : to the end that it may be understood and known of all, for as much as such good things as these, are to be accounted as common, there being no prohibition to the contrary : and, were especially not to be concealed from those that are our Country-men and naturalls of the same Kingdome. But for the better encouraging of others, and that notice may be taken of our good Government ; We give privilege and plenary power to the first Inventor and Author thereof, that, for the space of one whole and compleate yeare, he make his best benefit of the first Impression, not suffering or permitting any, without his speciall and particular License, to use or exercise the same, upon paine of our heavie displeasure.”

No, my dear X, I would not dream of suggesting any parallel between these outcasts and our business corporations or our legal and diplomatic professions.

Nor can I accept the canting crew as casting more than uncertain light upon the meaning of cant. But this generalization does emerge from the motives and operations of their society—that saying what you don’t mean is hiding what you do mean. Even so this is no explanation of how the meaning of Cant came to be extended from speech to thought. What one might say is that from being the medium of a falsehood, cant has extended its borders to cover the falsehood. “Prig” has had a very similar career. In the old days it was simply a slang term used by the confraternity for a thief.

Cant then has a long pedigree. Indeed it must surely have as continuous a historical (and legendary) record as war, one of its chief fertilizers. Shakespeare puts a piece of unconquerable cant into the mouth of Henry V :

“ O ! not to-day, think not upon the fault  
My father made in compassing the crown.  
I Richard’s body have interred anew  
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears  
Than from it issu’d forcèd drops of blood.  
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay  
Who twice a day their wither’d hands hold up  
Toward heaven, to pardon blood ; and I have built  
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests  
Sing still for Richard’s soul. More will I do ;  
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
Since that my penitence comes after all,  
Imploring pardon.”

The last three lines, instead of exonerating, set a cap

and seal on the others. How admirably the calculating and enumerative spirit of this pious humbug setting forth in pomp to rob and harry his neighbour's land, is coupled with his mock and picturesquely advertised humility ! Yes, those last three lines are cant of the first lustre, though I must allow there is a kind of naïveté in the totting up of his benefactions which adulterates the poison. How pleased Richard must have been ! But observe there is no jargon. The cant is in the thought.

After all, is it not the esoteric of cant to make a show of virtue ? Well, all depends upon whether you have it or no. If you have, you are only a Pharisee, thanking God you are better than your neighbours.

What then have the moderns done with cant from this point of view of a show of virtue, since the Industrial Revolution ? Shall I say, made cant respectable, made a business proposition of it ? Put a frock-coat on the Old Vice, to parody Shakespeare. Organised and advertised it. For its acceptance has grown to such a pitch that its cultivation is actually demanded and expected of certain professions—the business man, the schoolmaster, the lawyer, the clergyman, the journalist, and the Cabinet Minister. Where would they be if they told their charges what they thought ?

Indeed, when you come to look at it, there is something vicarious in the nature of cant. It abhors anything first-hand. It has a way of taking over a ready-made virtue and delivering it to our edification, as if it had leaped like a living phœnix out of the flames of a tremendous conviction. Mr. Square's "rule of right and eternal fitness of things" is an excellent example of this kind of false seemliness. For that reason cant languishes without

an audience. It is not the possession of virtue that matters ; it pines and wastes, unless it be communicated. Surely it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is not the possession of virtue that matters ; but the assurance in other people that you possess it. One sees at once how perilous a diabolism this is. Cant has its being in momentum—travelling, like Virgil's Rumor, from pillar to post. Like a ball, it fulfils itself in rapid passing from hand to hand. Canter No. 1, who lit the torch, begets a generation of little canters, and cant whirs like an aeroplane over all the land. Being a positive evil it must, I think, be hatched in the brain of an evil-doer. But it can very well be fostered in the woolly top-nests of any number of innocents.

Another thing abhorrent to cant is the due, sharp, and appropriate expression of a thought. Hence its frequent use of jargon, which swims, like a Leviathan, in a vague and chaotic verbiage. But not indispensably so, because cant both feeds more readily from the succulent Stilton of the pseudo-picturesque, and is radically a vice of the intellect. Own brother to hypocrisy, it uses its mind to effect its purpose. It is subtle and venomous, one of the vices that crawl upon their bellies—not leisurely, but with deadly speed. It is coldness counterfeiting heat, malice charity, profit disinterestedness, evil metamorphosed into good. To say to a man (as I saw recorded in a newspaper) who had pleaded the contrary, “God's law be damned,” for instance, is not cant. That is direct and honest. For one of our public men to speak of our soldiers in the war as “game-dogs,” scrim-maging in a dog-fight, is not cant, because there is no essential contradiction here between the quality of the

expression and the quality of the mind that expressed it. But it *is* cant for another of our public men to declare that "whenever I am feeling run-down, I always go to the front," because the plain meaning of such a statement is too vilely inhuman for sanity to admit. "The war has opened a window in heaven," again, is supreme cant, cant *in excelsis*, a cant of large generosity, because its tools are forged of elementally opposite principles. "£20,000,000 or £30,000,000 a year should be saved by cutting down the amounts paid to our soldiers and their pampered dependents" is the most interesting example of all. It is only the word "pampered" that at once fixes the sentence as cant and, at the same time, betrays and reveals what cant is. Had the speaker said, "Paid to our soldiers and their dependents" the statement would have been the bare reflection of a character. But "pampered" at once introduces the moral element and bids us contrast these Lu<sup>c</sup>ullan dependents with the exemplary Spartanism of the speaker—Lord Devonport. But I must give no more rein to examples or I should fill the vaults of the British Museum with these letters. Read the Northcliffe Evening Press, my dear X, and I warrant you will soon be glutted.

Inverted cant, which consists in professing not a greater degree of goodness than you possess, but of wickedness, the swash-buckling-desperado-fee-fi-fo-fum-no-tame-women-for-me attitude, which many of our harmless poets adopt, is not really an inverted cant, because its assumed pose is not primarily one of wickedness but of fine audacity and adventurousness. It is simply Byronism.

At any rate from whatever angle you look at it, cant

feeds on corruption, and the greater the corruption, the more fatted is cant. For it is the lie in the soul made true in the flesh. As Job says, "Can any man bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

## XXXI

### ARCADIA

MY DEAR X,

There is a village in the mountainous wilds of what our novelists would call "Blankshire," which Nature besieges with every Wordsworthian device in her armoury. The lines of the country are uniformly severe and cut into sweeping sombre designs, symmetrical in spite of their fullness and varied within their uniformity. I know of no countryside more accommodating to the painter. He has but to plant his stool capriciously to copy what he sees, and, however realistic he be, he can hardly avoid the finished composition with which Nature, illegally turning artist, so obligingly provides him. The hills are bare except for scrub, gorse or bracken ; the trees group themselves in the valleys—as hills and trees ought to do. Thank St. Michael (whose flaming sword preserved Adam and Eve from a too luscious Eden), those hills have more self-respect than the dollish tumuli of some of the midland counties, whose diminutive woods are perched upon them like parlour-maids' caps. Blankshire is no cosy, upholstered county, for the dalliance of button-booted poets. But it must not be imagined that she carries the

classical principle too far. She has her scarves, her colours and her graces to suggest rather than to reveal the austere nakedness of her moulding. Blue-bells are her spring garland, foxgloves her summer kirtle, and purple heather her autumn veil.

“ Where Nature’s horn increases so,  
The flowers have hardly room to grow,  
Children for lack of food are sick  
And men earn twelve-and-six a week.”

In the village dwell the stern and simple sons of her soil. There are only a few families, mostly of the fairly prosperous farmer type. One of these families possessed a young collie which they fed once a day on half a pint of separated milk. When we bought the collie to save him from starvation, the apple-cheeked matron of the farm hoped that we would send her a photograph of him that she might put it on the mantel-piece next to that of her little dead daughter. The night before we left, she bore down upon us like a benevolent duck with a jar of cream and a pot of jam, and pressed them into our deprecatory hands. She only charged us five shillings for them, sending her son to us on the following morning. This son was regarded as mentally deficient by the entire village. The only dealings we had with him were when, meeting him in a lane one day, he begged of us our name and address so that he might send us a rabbit at Christmas. That proved he was half-Bedlamite. The household of the farm in which we lodged consisted of a middle-aged father, mother and daughter, none of whom had ever been to London. The father had an intrigue with the wife of a labourer, who lived thirty yards away. Being

of a hospitable disposition, he insisted on his wife housing and feeding the girl while her husband was working in the fields. This wife of his, who was dying of acute dyspepsia, used to bustle about laying the cloth and setting palatable morsels before the girl whose husband only earned twelve and six a week. In former days Mrs. Giles had been a little recalcitrant, but having been beaten into the policy of the Open Door to such an extent that she used to sleep all night in the ditch, rather than face her husband's wrath, she had long been tranquilly resigned to these household duties. Our same hearty Farmer Giles had made it a matter of organized economy never to give his wife one penny of money to feed him, her daughter and herself and to run the house. She steeplechased over her difficulties by eating one potato a day herself and supplying the family out of the produce of the chickens which a married daughter had given her. Our arrival naturally did not please the head of the house, because the wife, having let the rooms, herself received the rent with which we were overcharged. The problem of getting rid of us was solved by the simple expedient of stamping at his most hob-nailed, and shouting at his most raucous, when he got up at five o'clock in the morning to milk the cows. His wife to some extent compensated herself for a premature loss of dividends by stealing the greater part of our imported larder. The girl who had captured the affections of this sturdy farmer was the mother of an epileptic daughter, whose life she had succeeded in insuring for ten pounds. On one occasion when the child was in convulsions the mother had secured the money and bought funeral robes for herself and cerements for the child. The little girl

recovered, and the mother was reconciled to her disbursements by saving the expense of future clothing, and dressing the former in her shroud. The child used to sleep between her mother and father, whose mutual disesteem was not confined to words. When the husband returned home from the fields, the cottage door was usually locked and the key (a good theme for Boccaccio) on the dresser of his rival's kitchen. Being, according to the verdict of the village, a harmless simpleton, he was prone to soak his cares in bouts of heavy drinking. He had once been cured by the vicar of the parish, but his wife had mercifully goaded him into them again. The rest of the village confined themselves to mutual hatred, scandal, and poisoning each other's dogs.

I agree, my dear X, that I am between the pot and the kettle—the neo-primitive theorist and the realistic poet. The one will indict, the other endite my material. But disentangling myself as best I may, I ask you—do you wonder that our cities sprawl?

. . . . .

The reason is not that the country is uninhabited, but uninhabitable. Now, if Government were enlightened and eager to do its people service, what would it do for those useless citizens who are interested in books? Well, I'll tell you. In the early summer months of each year, half a dozen friends would set out for a country pilgrimage in a motor caravan, laden to the chimney with books. All their expenses would be found, and the local authorities instructed that they were to be treated decently wherever they chose to put up. On the outside of the caravan, well-designed posters would announce the pur-

pose of the Argonauts' wayfaring and the contents of their Argo. At each village, a certain supply of the books would be dumped at the smithy or the inn or the most convenient farm or in a strong barn. Printed notices would be inserted in each book giving a simple and judicious summary of its charms, associations, interest, and (where necessary) its contents. The quality of the books would of course be graduated to the power of intelligent receptivity in their readers. But if they were simple books, they would assuredly not be bad ones. Some informal method of distribution and perhaps lecturing would be arranged, and away go our pilgrims to their next port of call. At the end of the summer, a collecting caravan would call at the various dumping grounds, fill up with the books, answer questions, suggest a further supply for the next year, and make a general report to the six weather-beaten ones who had preceded it.

In the winter, a small company of tried and competent artists would visit one or more of these villages with some honest plays in their trunks and enough stage furniture and effects to give them a creditable setting. *Not*, mark you, a company of high-brows with a supply of sandals for morris-dancing. The villagers would be trained to act these plays. In time—a very short time—a professional rustic drama would emerge, not only to act plays, but to write and act its own.\* Thus perhaps Boccaccio, moving from the farm-house to the barn, from the board to the boards, might be taught his proper place.

\* *N.B.*—I believe that this experiment has actually been tried with exhilarating success at Hildenborough.

## XXXII

### LES ENFANTS TERRIBLES

MY DEAR X,

I suppose you have guessed that I intended to devote an entire letter to the free verse crusaders.\* First it was a Public Health Committee on literary style (the very few people who do not ignore these letters, might so speak of it); then an expeditionary force was despatched against the realists. He (you say), whose epistles are such models of neatness, uniformity, precision, unity, balance and classical finish, will no doubt pursue his fetish of formlessness, his obsession of the sprawl. And there is free verse, positively dashing in its defiance of the laws of prosody, upon the tip of my pedant's lance, hurling itself into the smoke of his arid formalism, leaping into the crater of his dour and acrid regularism. Acknowledge me, my dear X, capable of mixed metaphors, at any rate, even if I ingeniously attribute them to you!

I am not to be deflected by your malice. So hey presto, here goes! As a matter of fact, I am inclined to think

\* Since writing the above, free verse has found its proper level. It is now easily seen that while it cannot revolutionize English verse, cadences and rhymes, it fulfils a valuable purpose, as the ramifying channel of light, satiric, humorous, occasional and *ad hoc* versification. But this letter was written when the claims of free verse were more Jingoistic.

something may come out of free verse—as soon as free verse can forget what a devil of a fellow it is. Considered as a reaction and experiment against a mere adequacy of metrical content, tenuity of idea, neutrality of inspiration, its impulse is reasonable. Whitman is its obvious parent ; there are Arnold and others, and you may even wrench the Authorized Version of the Bible into a rough approximation to the irregular metres of free verse or, to use the narrower and more scientific appellation—“Imagism.” Except, of course, that the Authorized Version is prose.

Now, I don’t believe that the case for free verse as a self-conscious rebellion against tradition will hold water for a moment, but before discussing that point it will be only fair to look into the Imagists’ own apology. This is the programme : “The language of common speech” (like Wordsworth’s) ; the creation of “new rhythms—as the expression of new moods” (as Marlowe, Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne, as well as Whitman and the French Symbolists did) ; “absolute freedom in the choice of subject” (a commonplace of every form of art) ; “to present an image” (without relevance to the mood\* or thought that suggests it?) ; and “concentration is of the very essence of poetry” (to which as a definition of lyric poetry a traditional lyrist like W. H. Davies would certainly agree.) So much for the programme which would scarcely seem to cork up the waters of the old Bandusian fount.

Now take the lady who signs herself H.D., a genuine poet, and with two or three exceptions (hereafter to be

\* *N.B.*—Anyway there is far too much wood in modern letters. So will there be, until literature is reconciled to normal life.

mentioned) the best, the most vigorous and precise of these ambiguous Imagists :

“ Whirl up, sea—  
Whirl your pointed pines  
Splash your great fires  
On our rocks  
Hurl your green over us  
Cover us with your pools of fire.”

There is the image perfectly obvious and definite. But it is an isolated image, a self-contained image, an image for its own sake. It in no way suggests, reveals, or fortifies a central idea. “ We are not a school of painters,” say the Imagists, “ but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities.” There you have it ; “ H.D.’s ” poem renders particulars exactly. But it does nothing else.

The initial error of the free verse school is indeed its refusal or inability, by the illumination and suggestion of metaphorical symbols, to manifest an ulterior beauty or to reveal an abstract or universal idea. Their images are employed, so to speak, departmentally—as though one were to take the burning coals out of a fire and set them separately in a row. The result is that the fire goes out, since images, unless they are strands interwoven with the poetic fabric, are only scattered impressions. Here, for instance, is a recipe for an Imagist poem of mine own :

“ The sky is jaundiced,  
The brown birds make indentations in the white snow,  
Nature broods  
Spasmodically.

My heart gapes like the yellow sky,  
It beats  
Against the white futility of my bosom,  
Like the feet of a staccato brown bird,  
Broodingly."

No, that is only a little gymnastic.

I don't think it would be a bad idea to take D. H. Laurence as an example of the free verse tendency, not because he shows either its best or its worst, but because the sheer coruscations of his poetic temper give a vivid impression of what free verse can do and what it cannot. Once upon a time there was fought between Dekker, Marston, Chapman, Ben Jonson, and their camp followers a deadly tournament in rhyme, a swelling Battle of Books, which Dutch, home-spun Dekker called "that terrible poetomachia." It is a far cry from these stalwarts to our modernists, and except in exuberance, impatience of restraint, and—in all except Ben Jonson and sometimes in Dekker—an effort to pluck up the glooms and agonies of the soul rather than inhale its perfumes and rapture, they have little enough in common with these modernists.

But that happy phrase "poetomachia" seems to me extremely appropriate to the cast and texture of Laurence's poems. Some critics have been in the habit of confusing the wealth, variety and vigour—not, it must be acknowledged, sifted clear from a frequent tortuousness and incongruity—of Lawrence's imagery with a diversity of mood. But he is not a poet of moods, but of a mood. Even his experience is limited and concentrated rather than progressive or stored with variegated memories. To pursue the analysis even further, his poetic method

is also accustomed to turn upon one pivot. This method is clearly evident. In poem after poem of "Love Poems" and "Amores" one finds him first of all striking out a bold, sharp, angular, sometimes original image from nature—an image, so to speak, with a high-light upon it—and then sinking that image into the equally bold expression of his emotion. This abrupt leap from a general to a personal impression is nearly always distinct and traceable. Now had Laurence a cornucopia of feeling to pour into a poetic mould, this comparatively simple process would probably not suffice him, and his readers would soon grow tired of watching nature twisted and contorted into a variety of shapes to accord with a manifold complexity of emotional needs. The great poet fuses his material by a shorter cut, by a more unified and embracing vision. But Laurence's mood being single, his method of expression, though prone to ungainly lapses, as of a poet "moving about in worlds not realized," is not unsuitable to it. Particularly as that mood, being a rude conflict between spiritual and physical forces, gives a hammer-like vigour to the images struck violently out of nature. As a poet, Laurence is still a long way from poetic self-expression. But as an artist, using rhyme and metre to suggest a mood of disgust, disillusion, vain rebelliousness, and aspiration, tormented egoism and unrest, he makes sometimes a pitying, sometimes a repellent but always a powerful impression upon the reader. Where, I think, he falls short of sheer poetic realization is in his failure to make his mood or experience ours. The reader is always conscious of watching this passionately struggling mood from a distance. The poetic impulse, being too exclusively personal, rather drags its

experience down into itself, than sends it outwards into contact with universals.

Now how does Laurence use metre? It is hardly necessary for me to say that a poet may rhyme and yet write free verse. His rhymes sometimes have a curiously artificial ring, as though they were arbitrary and accidental marriages of sound—as though (as he actually does) he were writing rhymes in the free verse manner. I cannot guess the reason of this, unless it be that Laurence has a deficient ear. There are certainly one or two examples which give colour to the suspicion :

“Almond and apple and pear diffuse with light, that very  
Soon strews itself on the floor.”

This is metre walking on a club-foot. Again :

“I cannot see her, since the mist’s white scarf  
Obscures the dark wood and the dull orange sky ;  
But she’s waiting, I know, impatient and cold, half-  
Sobs struggling into her frosty sigh.”

A run-on line is of course perfectly legitimate, but how clumsily he has used it here. Lastly :

“A big bud of moon hangs out of the twilight,  
Star-spiders spinning their thread,  
Hang high suspended, *withouten* respite  
Watching us overhead.”

So deliberate a false lengthening of a foot needs no pointing out. Nor can these objections be dismissed as merely academic. A poet may sway his metres with what licence he pleases, as long as he satisfies the ear. The

metre is made for man not man for the metre. Metre always, of course, ought to be studied in relation to the thought or feeling which shapes it. It was only the eighteenth-century heroic couplet which shaped the thought and feeling to the metre. But these departures of Laurence's are ugly and discordant—*intrinsically* so.

The vital thing then in Laurence's work is not so much its inherent poetic quality as the author's power to drive a harsh, sudden, "anguished" mood into rhythmic expression. A finished workman in poetic style he is not. Still less is he a poet who has achieved poetic form—a very different thing from poetic finish. Nor can he claim to be a thinker of profound discovery and searching insight, articulating his thought in inevitable verse. But as an experimenter, using verse-forms to utter a terrible dissatisfaction of spirit, he has a quality of his own.

You may feel that this brief note about D. H. Laurence, a poet I fear who will not last, is merely a digression. But what I wanted to bring out was, in the first place, that free verse will and can contain a subjective mood if projected with sufficient force into it, and, in the second place, that in its present inorganic stage it will and can contain very little else. Laurence is interesting because he is so forcible and because the fragmentary effect of free verse suits the fragmentary impulse of a restless, isolated mood.\*

\* It is fair to say, that a year or two after writing these lines, Laurence produced a volume in which the egocentric mood that plucked life and passion up by the roots, not to see how they were growing, for he was never an insincere poet, but fling them away in despair—was subdued and softened. In it, instead of digging images violently and angularly out of Nature, he began to allow his imagination to play upon Nature, as light upon a sensitive surface, revealing its quality and texture. He began to remember the old, unhappy, far-off confusions, in the autumnal glow of the great natural changes.

Perhaps you remember that at the beginning of this serpentine letter, I defined the original impulse of free verse as a self-conscious reaction against tradition—as proceeding from the impression that metrical content had become a dancing slipper for a minute and over-manicured foot.

But it is precisely by this declamatory attitude of revolt that free verse fails. Not only because it throws the emphasis upon a purely personal expression (and we are sick of egoism in literature), but because the liberators confused cause and effect. What was wrong with verse was not its conventions, but its conventionalists. The elasticity and fluctuations of rhyme are, as a matter of fact, of such extent and variety that they will satisfy practically all the human emotions susceptible of poetic treatment. Look at the extraordinarily subtle modulations of rhythm and metre which Donne made use of to carry the harshest, as the most exalted, the most exquisite, as the most disillusioned of sexual passions.

In fact, the mistake that the pioneers of modern free verse made was in regarding it as a reaction at all. As a different form from rhyme, running parallel with orthodox metres, it has a legitimate, if limited function ; as an antagonistic and contrasted form it is little more than a barren heresy. The rebels are preoccupied with and therefore dependent upon the rhymed conventions ; they are a mere gesture of dissent. How far this is true of the Imagists' devotion to externals is shown by their constant use of poetic moods and experience radically stale and to be discarded by the matured judgment of a later generation.

That is where the accusation of “formlessness” comes in.

I suppose that in the old days the free versifiers were the subject of poetic scandal because their lines, not being of parallel length, afflicted an eye accustomed to the methodical rows of suburban houses. But what is wrong with them is not a lack but an excess of technique. Obsessed with "form," which they cheerfully confused with geometry or gaol or a thin red line of neatness, they invented their creed and wrote up to it. The *manner* of writing verse was what bothered them, and away they splashed into a new mannerism.

Indeed the Imagist separation of style from substance rather reminds me of the rhymed prose of Llyl's "Euphuies" (1578). Euphuism was perhaps the most intricate, elaborate, artificial, and difficult pattern of sound, ever accomplished by the too-eager devotee of literature —far more so than "Gongorism" or Arcadianism which supplanted it ten years later. It is a style on parade, and its irretrievable flaw is that it destroys the link between meaning and expression. In Euphuism words are not symbols of things but mere mechanical counters. The result is that Llyl defeated his own structural and architectural purpose. He was the first conscious stylist of modern times, but his practice overwhelmed his theory. In the first place the sheer redundancy of his simile and illustration (a friend, he says, is "in prosperity a pleasure, a solace in adversity, in grief a comfort, in joy a very companion") is a difference, not in meaning but in mere sound. Secondly, there is the falseness, irrelevance and irresponsibility of his analogies. Now the formula of the Euphuistic style is constructed purely on analogy. It runs: "For as the A is B, so the C is D, and the more E is F the more G is H." But if the separate bricks are

not cemented together, if they are not integral parts of the central design, the whole edifice falls to pieces. They are not. "The goat, the fatter she is the less fertile she is : yea, man the more witty he is the less happy he is." Never mind about the accuracy of the observation ; there is no earthly correlation between fatness and wit, happiness and fertility. Here is another example. When Lucilla, the heroine, is false to Philautus and begins "to fry in the flames of love" for Euphues, her exciting courtship in terms of botany, zoology, mythology, and mineralogy ambles away like this : "Doth he not remember that the broken bone once set together, is stronger than it was, that the greatest blot is taken off with pumice, that though the spider poison the fly, she cannot infect the bee, that although I have been light to Philautus, yet I may be lovely to Euphues ?" Do you see a likeness between the rhymed prose of Euphues and the rhymeless verse of our Imagists ? They both lose themselves in technique alone ; they can both be threaded on a string of disconnected images.

I told you there were two poets who, to my mind, topped their fellows. For they are concerned more with the structural canons and workmanship of free verse than with those of its arbitrarily created enemy. T. S. Eliot is one of them ; Joseph Campbell the other. With them that chaotic impression disappears—an impression derived not from any external irregularity of stress or metre, but from a structural, an inward inconsequence. Eliot uses rhyme and free verse with equal freedom, but one is not conscious in the latter of effort or division between the impulse of expression and its final content. Here is a poet who has chosen free verse, not to advertise

his secession, but because its cadences suit the particular mood and quality of his expression. He is not disturbed either by its natural flexibility or by any arbitrary laws as to the need for it. That is to say, he allows the technical grouping of his words to evolve from the sequence of his thought and to form a natural covering for it. Here are a few lines from a poem called "The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock" (in rhyme, with a free verse setting)—a vivid series of pictures adroitly handled and conveying the rapid transitions of a psychological mood :

"I grow old . . . I grow old  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach  
I shall wear white-flannelled trousers and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the merm-girls singing, each to each.  
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward to the waves,  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea,  
By seagirls wreathed with seaweed old and brown  
Till human voices wake us and we drown."

But it is really satirical verse (and excellent at that). The other is Joseph Campbell :

"THE STRANGER"

"Whence comes the strange  
That with hoarse lifted throat  
Threatens the fields?

## LETTERS TO X

Night's darkness,  
And the darkness of mystery  
Cover him as in a tent of two hides.

At twilight  
I looked through the windows of my body,  
And lo ! the sheaves scattered  
And the rooted trees uptorn.

His feet are flails of iron :  
What he has threshed  
Only the birds of the air will gather,  
Bedstraw and branch  
Will lie and rot and dig unseen graves.

The wind blows where it wills  
(The Gift of Heaven wrote it in Patmos)  
I hear the sound thereof,  
But cannot tell whence it comes  
Or whither it will go.

War rides, without thought,  
On a pale horse  
Through quiet places.  
His banners are smoking torches,  
His trumpets blow horribly.

He reaps a red harvest,  
But not with the crooks of sickles.  
The swathes fall slowly,  
And the wings of vultures shadow them.

Love is a lamb, for weakness ;  
Kin a dove for sorrow ;  
Peace the silence of a song.”

But I must draw in my horns, though the poem has such a grave and peculiar quality that I should like to quote it all. Neither of these poems are of the greatest, the most synthetic kind. They excel by taking full advantage of the pictorial quality. And though their pictures do not blend into a single picture, they pass over a single screen, orderly and rhythmically. I would even dare to prophesy that these poets, if they develop a mature poetic power, will find that free verse tends to hamper rather than assist their expression. It is too undirected, too fluid a medium for any but the experimental poet busy with forms rather than waiting upon form. It lets the emotion, the thought, the cadence out at the corners. It bends loosely to feeling but does not discipline thought. And to some of the poets who use it, it is a convenient device for little riches in an infinite room.

### XXXIII

#### A PILGRIM WHO STOPPED HALF-WAY

MY DEAR X,

In this letter I mean to give you a taste of a poet who achieved a very high level of expert composition, *without* finding imaginative form—James Elroy Flecker. There are three obvious points about him. He had a poetic method of his own, he was isolated from his contemporaries, and he was inspired by a very strong sense of tradition. Here is a portion of his preface to “The Golden Journey to Samarkand” :

“ The Parnassian school was a classical Reaction against the perfervid sentimentality and extravagance of some French romantics. The Romantics in France, as in England, had done their powerful work and infinitely widened the scope and enriched the language of poetry. It remained for the Parnassians to raise the technique of their art to a height which should enable them to express the subtlest ideas in powerful and simple verse. But the real meaning of the term Parnassian may be best understood from considering what is definitely not Parnassian. To be didactic like Wordsworth, to write dull poems of unwieldly length, to bury like Tennyson or Browning poetry of exquisite beauty in monstrous realms of vulgar, feeble, or obscure versifying, to overlay fine work with gross and irrelevant egoism like Victor Hugo would be abhorrent, and rightly so,

to members of this school. On the other hand, the finest work of many great English poets, especially Milton, Keats, Matthew Arnold, and Tennyson, is written in the same tradition as the work of the great French school: and one can but wish that the two latter poets had had something of a definite theory to guide them in self-criticism."

And again :

"At the present moment there can be no doubt that English poetry stands in need of some such saving doctrine to redeem it from the formlessness and the didactic tendencies which are now in fashion. As for English criticism, can it not learn from the Parnassian, or any tolerable theory of poetic art, to examine the beauty and not 'the message' of poetry?"

Lastly, he declares the *Golden Journey* to have been written "with the sole intention of creating beauty."

That preface is as relevant to his work and its reaction from the modern poetic orientation as was the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* to the purposes of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Even though Flecker died of consumption before he had passed thirty, a considerable body of verse remains. And (my text is the collected edition), except for the last few pages (the poems are arranged more or less chronologically), which convey the fragmentary, confused and over-coloured impression natural to a poet fighting vainly against disease, one clearly perceives a sure development of rhythmic power founded upon a theory of poetic art, both natural to Flecker's temperamental approach to literature and indispensable to the quality of his talent. Let me make no mistake about that word "theory." He runs nothing to death, in problems either of structure or detail. True enough;

but bear in mind that on both points he is not theorizing in the air. He is simply defining and materializing his own poetic impulse. Flecker did not beat out a suit of armour and then squeeze himself painfully into it. His poetry and the theoretic expression of its poetic principle stand in the relation of parent and child. The one exists independently, the other, created out of it, is its natural and inevitable advocate. I must make this point, to separate his poetry from the didactic in the first place and, in the second, to distinguish it as implicitly a return to a special kind of tradition and a defiance of a poetic literature violently sundered from it. Flecker's poetic theory, in fact, was simply the product of self-criticism and self-knowledge. Limited in range, measurable in power and intensity, he made the very utmost and the very best of what he possessed. He did not fall back on technique or the Parnassians to puff out and dress up a paltry poetic endowment. The rarest poetic form was not his, but he set out for it and stopped just where he knew that to go farther was to lose himself and wander in circles.

It is not my business in this letter to discuss Flecker's contemporaries, but his critical declaration bears pertinently upon his confident pilgrimage to poetic maturity and must be contrasted with the vacillations of his brother poets. Leaving out of account all qualitative standards, is it not remarkable how even the best of our modern young poets will write one brilliant volume and thenceforward live on its harvest?\* I don't mean materially of course, but in the sense that the aftermath is a constant effort to write up to the crest of that earlier volume.

\* This was written some time ago.

They try to realize, gather up, and sustain the sudden impetuosity of that first rapture. Rupert Brooke is one example among many. Brooke discovered himself at once. He leaped straight to an eminence he deserved. But thereafter he steadily declined. The reason of that decline is not far to seek. His poetic development was concurrent with a growth in self-consciousness. The impersonal quality, the objective reality of his vision was gradually narrowed and obscured, and replaced by a particular consciousness usurping the universal. Just this stress upon a self-conscious expression transformed him from an inspired into a talented poet. With Flecker the interesting thing is that the process was in precisely the other direction. In spite of profuse imagery any facile diction his "*Juvenilia*" are rather trivial and mannered, highly conventional, and obedient to the models of Tennyson, Francis Thompson, Swinburne, Flaubert, Baudelaire, the Parnassians, and others. But as obviously, his early poems are *in statu pupillari*—the experiments of a poet feeling his way out of the opaqueness and ambiguities of a rash quest for beauty into the, clear, open, Grecian daylight, with its confined horizonse its definite outlines, its bold colouring, and its concrete appeal. It is a psychological excitement to read the poems in succession and to mark "the growth of the poet's mind" to its fine accomplishment. Here, in a precise and candid light, are the chain of fortresses the poet has to subdue; here you may observe him getting rid of incidentals and of the self-conscious accretions which impede his poetic freedom, the substitution of concrete for abstract phraseology, the increasing fastidiousness in choice of expression, the expansion of

metrical boundaries to contain stronger and swifter apprehensions, and finally his hard and painful realization of that objective treatment which was peculiarly his own.

Let us here clear away a possible confusion. Flecker's treatment and workmanship are plainly classic—his feeling and selection of material as obviously romantic. Flecker is not really a Grecian any more than Keats was. The Greeks were classical only to themselves; to the Christian eras they have been invariably romantic. Flecker not only draws as copiously upon Oriental and mediæval sources, but the Greeks have a twofold appeal for him—romantic in their distance, strangeness, and contrast from the chaos, distractions and immediate contacts of modern life ("devotion to something afar, from the sphere of our sorrow" exactly expresses it), and classical only as a model for the lucidity and directness of his technical method. The one, as Flecker said, may be a complement of the other. Indeed, his perception of poetic reality, though of course it fluctuated, advancing and receding before his gaze in his early work, *precedes* his appropriate embodiment of it. His inspiration is both extended and intensified in his progress, but the history of that progress, as I said, is primarily a struggle to carve out the constructive framework and, by mastering the problems of poetic skill, to produce a clear, objective entity. His artistic purpose throughout was to work out what tradition meant to him and what kind of tradition suited him best, and then to absorb that tradition at first capriciously and at last inevitably into his poetry.

That is the right way to work—for him. But what is Flecker's special poetic quality? The poetic quality,

that is to say, of his finest work—of “ Mary Magdalen ” (with its tenderness that is so rare in his verse) :

“ ‘ O Mary, not for this,’ I cried,  
 ‘ Did’st thou renounce thy scented pride.  
 Not for the roll of endless years  
 Or fields of joy undewed by tears  
 Did’st thou desert the courts of men.  
 Tell me thy truth, grave Magdalen ! ’ ”  
 She trembled, and her eyes grew dim :—  
 ‘ For love of Him, for love of Him.’ ”

“ The War-song of the Saracens ” (with its astonishingly flexible versification) :

“ And the spear was a Desert Physician who cured not a few of ambition,  
 And drove not a few to perdition with medicine bitter and strong :  
 And the shield was a grief to the fool and as bright as a desolate pool.  
 And as straight as the rock of Stamboul when their cavalry thundered along.”

“ The Masque of the Magi ” (which has the still, decorative beauty of an Early Italian painting) :

“ I am Balthazar, Lord of Ind,  
 Where blows a soft and scented wind  
 From Taprobane towards Cathay.  
 My children, who are tall and wise,  
 Stand by a tree with shutten eyes  
 And seem to meditate or pray  
 And there red drops of frankincense  
 Betoken man’s intelligence :  
 Hail, Lord of Wisdom, Prince of Day ! ”

Though I don't much care for "shutten." And then at the end :

" 'Who art thou, little King of Kings ?'  
His wondering mother sings."

"The Ballad of Iskander" (his high water mark, and whose subtlety of rhythm and elfin magic place it in a direct descent from "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel") :

"In twenty days the silver ship  
Had passed the isle of Serendip  
And made the flat Araunian coasts  
Inhabited, at noon, by ghosts.

In thirty days the ship was far  
Beyond the land of Calcobar  
Where men drink dead men's blood for wine  
And dye their beards alizarine."

"The Golden Journey to Samarkand" (with its rare melody), "Gates of Damascus" (with its Eastern but finely directed opulence of imagery) :

"Beyond the rock is Restful Bay, where no wind breathes or  
ripple stirs,  
And there on Roman ships, they say, stand rows of metal  
mariners.

Beyond the bay in utmost West, old Solomon the Jewish King  
Sits with his beard upon his breast, and grips and guards his  
magic ring :

And when that ring is stolen, he will rise in outraged majesty  
And take the World upon his back, and fling the World beyond  
the sea."

How apt and precise in sound and meaning is that "Roman."

Flecker's poetry is not indeed of the bravest, most translunary kind. That is partly due to a deliberate confinement. He set out to conquer a certain poetic territory and he conquered it. More, he neither achieved nor intended. Much of his verse is cold, remote and decorative—a jewel throwing out steely points of light, a casket encrusted with "refined" and "splendid gold." Somehow, he courted but never quite won the mysterious heart of Romance—only held her hand and looked into her eyes. He is a courtier, but the old ballads "silently, invisibly . . . took her with a sigh":

"Then he's gart built a bonny ship,  
And set it in the sea,  
Wi' four and twenty mariners  
To bear her company.

O he's gart built a bonny ship,  
To sail on the salt sea ;  
The mast was o' the beaten gold,  
The sails o' cramoisie.

The sides were o' the gude stout aik,  
The deck o' mountain pine,  
The anchor o' the silver shene,  
The ropes o' silken twine."

("The Lass o' Lochroyan.")

But that is an unfair comparison. Flecker's poems produce indeed not a sculpturesque but a wrought and hammered effect, as though he worked not with stone or marble but with metals. He had a wonderful sense of

colour, but radically, I think, he is the poet of Isis and not, as a friend of mine, who edited him with fine taste and devotion, claims, of Helios.

But mystical passion and exploration are absent, and their absence is the defect in an idea of beauty which to him is rather an end in itself than a means. Beauty is not after all an enclosed garden, but an horizon in which the normal and perceptible melt into the impalpable, the transcendent and the divine—not the spirit, but the garment of the spirit: “Where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not.” No beauty that lacks an intuition of the immortal spirit can achieve the final consummation—the absorption in God. And no poetry, which is not electrified by contact with the First Causes, the truth and reality of things, can be anything but secondary. The highest poetry only uses forms as representations of Form. It must be symbolic and conscious of its spiritual origin.

Flecker, that is to say, mellow, rounded, masterful and secure as he is, did not achieve imaginative, significant, creative form—if the expression means anything, and I think it does—he fell short of it, and possibly the reason is precisely because, as he says, he examined so brilliantly and thoroughly the beauty, but not the message of poetry.

## XXXIV

### SCULPTURESQUE POETRY

MY DEAR X,

I am more than glad that these stray epistles about the modern poets, who, like the realistic novelists, are so ready to strangle the insidious serpents of tradition in their cradles, have given me an opportunity to wander among them. For both groups (like so much of modern literature) represent a break with the past—the realists by fastening like a succubus upon the present, the libertines (a merely figurative kakophuism, I assure you) by unwinding from their muscular bodies what they conceive to be the swaddling-clothes of tried metrical forms. Grant them a case and I am still unable to understand why it should be considered part of the Tables of the Law that a revolutionary artist must topple the artistic past into the dustbin. What nonsense it is ! Was freedom invented only in the twentieth century ? Do the records of man's passions, struggles, ideals, experiments, hopes and achievements begin only in 1900 ? I am confident that humanity will never get anywhere by simply turning its back upon its parentage. Re-examine, re-interpret, and redistribute the æsthetic values of the past—of the whole past—and that is a different matter.

Indeed the utmost I would concede is that the past is the raw material to be used, shaped, and fertilized by the present and future for their ends.

There is, of course, a solid voucher of this in the work of other contemporary poets. De la Mare, W. H. Davies, the exquisite A. E. Housman, Bridges, W. J. Turner, James Stephens, and, in his more limited appeal, Ralph Hodgson, and others, are all children of tradition. All of them in their several artistic preferences have asserted the old forms without either paralysing their freedom or compromising their originality.\* Are they sterile or superannuated poets?

But a more definite reaction against the inchoate and asymmetric in poetic composition appears in the work of the "statuesque" poets—Sturge Moore and "Michael Field." Sturge Moore, though he has been shamefully neglected by his generation and ours, is familiar enough to you, and all true lovers of poetry, for me to leave his noble rhythms, large utterance, firm perceptions, and profound psychologies (as in "*Judith*") safely in your and their hands.

But I may be forgiven a short note on "Michael Field," partly on account of her own quality, partly on account of her remoteness from the verse impressionists and partly because she is (I should rather say, they are) in some measure a disciple of Sturge Moore's. Her work diverges from that of Flecker (a worker in enamels would be a rough definition of him) in this different quality of the sculpturesque. Poetry, being the most compact form

\* These words, of course, were written before Edward Thomas died and was born again in poetry. Out of traditional forms, he has developed a new form, which may possibly be of profound significance in the future development of poetry.

of æsthetic realization and, at the same time, the most receptive to influence, has, far more than prose which creates its own content, borrowed from its sister arts. It is like an empire which, swaying other and alien nationalities under its own laws, adopts and absorbs into itself its colonies' essences and characteristics. Thus poetry, still preserving its own form and character intact, will readily approximate to music, painting and sculpture. The predominant effects of Spenser are pictorial, of Herrick and Swinburne musical, and of Landor statu-esque. Sculpture has shaped and informed the poetic impulse far less than music and painting. There are very few of the great poets outside Landor, who made his epigrams like Tanagra statuettes, and James Thompson, who hewed his epic out of a solid block of darkness, who have given their expression that air of arrested, petrified mobility, which is the tribute of sculpture to poetry.

But there can be no doubt that "Michael Field" has achieved this distinction, as indeed her reputation shows. It is obvious that the sculpturesque muse has a narrow but individual (not personal) appeal. In the same way "Michael Field's" poetry has never been subject, as that of so many other contemporary poets has been, to eclipses, or excesses, or capriciousness. A small circle of discriminating critics has poured out for her the discreet libations demanded by the value of her utterance. Outside that circle, she has been practically unknown. The recognition fits the desert, for her work has maintained throughout a judicious level of output, both in the separate pieces and in their relation to the whole. This admirable tractability of treatment to material is marked in all her work.

The cast of her thought naturally directs her workmanship towards containing and realizing her artistic purpose. The result is a harmony and balance that hardly admits of flaws in the general handling but only in casual or individual mannerisms or turns of phrase. Her poetry is always free from the grosser vices. There is no fumbling with the poetic interpretation of the idea ; no attempt to starve it or to cumber it with irrelevant ornament ; no interruption in its evolution to an appropriate expression.

The resemblances indeed between the poetry of " Michael Field " and that of Sturge Moore, the only other modern poet who has wrought his material into a marmoreal pose, are more than superficial. The classical strength of feeling and expression, the orchestration of rhythm, the massive and processional effects, the highly literary flavour, the packed sense, even the occasionally elliptical and obscure perversions of grammar, all these elements they share in common. " Michael Field " does not, it is true, attain Sturge Moore's range and power. Her poetry never captures the supreme felicity ; its strong competence, its imaginative solidity, its steady flame, hardly wing her muse into upper regions. Her poetry is not a heaven, but a sane and gracious earth. Or rather her muse is at once elevated and sensuous, most at home in a lower ether, not too remote from earth, yet sublimated from it. I quote " Looking up to the Stars " (from *Wild Honey*) :

" Not so the sun that presently must drop,  
And in damp night, no comfort for the eye ;  
Not as the moon that climbeth by and by,

Too late for my sad eve : as the full crop  
Of stars that, clear or trembling, without stop  
Amass in myriad feature in the sky,  
Is manifest the law that as I die  
Fills all my heaven to the arched top.  
What feats of gods are these in permanence,  
Conflicts and reconciliations there,  
As in a chrystral, moving to the sense !  
Glad am I through these draughts of quiet air,  
To breathe such visitings, and, in pale stream,  
The crossing and recrossing of a dream."

From "Dedicated" (an early work published late) :

"They lift themselves, and more, they cannot see,  
The spring-tide changing this—they cannot be,  
Where all is solemnness of blindfold glades :  
They cannot see the spring, but in the hollow,  
Unmirroring, vast, their feet are blessed and follow  
Some bent of beauty twilight overshades."

But do not let me lead you astray. "Michael Field" may use the chisel, and as often as not upon classical material. But principally her inspiration is not classical but romantic. Indeed she writes plays (even *classical* plays like "Callirrhoé") in the romantic, the Elizabethan method. How strongly Elizabethan are these lines from "Fair Rosamund," where Elinor has laid the cup and dagger before Rosamund :

" What a curl o' the lash—  
A lovely coastline to the hidden realm  
Of the eyes.—  
Have you thought of me these many days ?

Queen, wife and mother, and the thing you are,  
Old age is heir  
Apparent to the majesty of Death,  
And thought of the impending royalty  
Softening the manners, and should awe the heart  
Of youth—that churl of nature!"

Yet somehow this hot romantic liquid is run into a mould, is arrested into a dignified shape and petrified. Here again is the free union between the classic and romantic. So too with her passion, for I do not want to give the impression that "Michael Field" is cool as moonlight. She is more passionate than Flecker, who, even at his best, is a trifle frosty.

But what I am anxious to make clear is that the difference between the Imagists and Flecker, " Michael Field," and one or two other poets I have in my epistolary mind, is not one between poets with technique and poets without. Both parties have it, on the contrary. The Imagists indeed are simply a division in the array of the pseudo-picturesques. They set themselves to break from artistic tradition ; they reflect in little the dark and terrible discords of modern life, and they exploit style. They wrench technique away from its proper and secondary duties, and pervert it into a bauble. But the poets of this other group make no such divorce. They study and learn technique in precisely the same way as a man of serious occupation must study and learn his job. They use it upon this vision or poetic feeling or sense of beauty simply as a preliminary but indispensable means to the poetic knowledge, which, in its final triumph, is form. Had they achieved form, they could have discarded technique.

Thus "Michael Field's" poetry should endure after the Roaring Boys have made their last riot through the streets of what the Americans have no doubt called Apolloville.

## XXXV

### AN IMAGE-MAKER

MY DEAR X,

As a counter weight to the presentists (that is their right name—not futurists), I have another poet to introduce to you. What if I call up a poet who, by a propriety of metre as devoted in its way as any tinkling rhyme spun out of gossamer and the pollen of daffodillies, *actually beats the makers of images at their own game?* His name is John Banister Tabb, and he died a few years ago. He was an American by birth, and in the Civil War was a cabin-boy in a blockade ship. That seems to have been his only earthly adventure, for he became a priest, and retired to an Ecclesiastical College in one of the Southern States. In his declining years he became blind. Nor is he many leagues from the resting-place of blind Thamyris and blind Mæconides, prophets old—John B. Tabb, poetic traveller from the States.

Whether English readers are well acquainted with him, I do not know. Burns and Oates issued a selection of his poems in 1910, edited and with a little postscript by Mrs. Meynell. But I am quite sure that he has not and never had a tithe of the reputation possessed even by a wretched poetaster like Ezra Pound. He is not in the currency of discussion to anything like the same extent

as even a comparatively secluded poet like Ralph Hodgson, whose "Song of Honour" (you will pardon so short and excusable a parenthesis) is one of the finest poems of this century. Nor is he included in that (literally) weighty volume, "The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse." I believe that, as a matter of fact, he did appear in a volume of living poets, edited by William Archer. It had wood-cut portraits, which would have made the murder of Mr. Archer by any of the authors so delineated a justifiable homicide.

His work is nearly all religious, and I can do nothing better than dash you out half a dozen of his poems without more ado :

"THE SMITER":

"They bound Thine eyes and questioned, 'Tell us now  
Who smote Thee?' Thou wast silent, when to-day  
Mine eyes are holden, and again they say,  
'Who smote Thee?' Lord, I tell them it is Thou."

"NATURE":

"It is His garment; and to them  
Who touch in faith its utmost hem  
He, turning, says again, 'I see  
That virtue hath gone out of Me.'"

"THE MID-SEA SUN":

"No peak to hide his splendour till the day  
Has passed away;  
Nor dial-shade of any tree or flower  
To mark the hour:  
A wave his orient cradle, and a wave  
His western grave."

## “THE HAUNTED MOON”:

“ Still closer doth she cowl with night  
 Her visage white,  
 To hide her from the spectre grey  
 Of yesterday,  
 Deep buried in his sepulchre  
 To all but her.”

## “A SUNSET”:

“ What means it, Lord? No Daniel  
 In Nature’s banquet hall  
 Appears, thy messenger, to spell  
 The writing on the wall.  
 Is it the Babylonian doom  
 A kingdom passed away,  
 A midnight monarch to assume  
 The majesty of Day?”

And this translunary rapture on his blindness, “Fiat Lux”:

“ Give us this day our daily bread and *light*:  
 For more to me, O Lord, than food is sight:  
 And I at noon have been  
 In twilight, where my fellow-men were seen  
 ‘As trees’ that walked before me. E’en to-day  
 From time to time there falls upon my way  
 A feather of the darkness. But again  
 It passes; and amid the falling rain  
 Of tears, I lift, O Lord, mine eyes to Thee,  
 For, lo! I *see!*”

I had meant to quote nothing but his short lyrics. They are what he mostly writes, and there seems to me something queerly appropriate in the fact that they were

written by a man called Tabb—because a man called Tabb is very different from a man called Robert Montgomery. Indeed, this little breviary of speech reminds me of Marvell's "On a Drop of Dew," some lines of which I give you, because they contain the right kind of criticism :

" And in its little Globe's Extent,  
 Frames as it can its native Element.  
 How it the purple flow'r does slight,  
 Scarce touching where it lies,  
 But gazing back upon the Skies,  
 Shines with a mournful light :  
      Like its own Tear,  
 Because so long divided from the Sphear  
 Restless it roules and unsecure,  
 Trembling lest it grow impure :  
 Till the warm Sun pity its Pain,  
 And to the Skies exhale it back again.  
 So the Soul, that Drop, that Ray,  
 Of the clear Fountain of Eternal Day,  
 Could it within the human flow'r be seen,  
 Remembering still its former height,  
 Shuns the sweet leaves and blossoms green ;  
 And recollecting its own Light,  
 Does in its pure and circling thoughts express  
 The greater Heaven in an Heaven less."

Still, I cannot forbear from quoting a longer poem—a child quite in its teens—"Life" :

" Me, in the midst of dateless centuries,  
 By Love concealed,  
 Now newly swathed in mortal destinies,  
 Hath Time revealed.

A breathing space, a silence, and behold  
What I have been,  
Unswathed, the circling centuries enfold,  
Again unseen.

With Days and Nights brief fellowship was mine,  
But unto thee  
I come, a child, inseparably thine,  
Eternity."

Mrs. Meynell, in her delicate appreciation, compares Tabb with George Herbert "in the slight paradox of interplay and counterchange" common to them both. But I am not much affected by the comparison. Herbert has a way of making too much of his paradoxes, of stretching them out like elastic until they are so thin a touch would snap them. Nor can he afford this licence, because his thought, though seldom pedestrian and never quite commonplace, is neither abundant nor electric. But Tabb's idea, be it rich or slender, is at once united with the rhythm of his expression. Not that compression, in contradistinction to Herbert's diffusiveness, is the mark of his poetry. A poet of compressed ideas (Donne, for instance) packs them so tight that they almost burst their metrical bonds. As Carew says of Donne in that magnificent elegy of his :

" Since to the awe of thy imperious wit  
Our troublesome language bends, made only fit  
With her tough, thick-rib'd hoops, to gird about  
Thy Gyant fancy, which had proved too stout  
For their soft melting phrases."

Ideas strike other concepts from their close-pressed

fellows until the poetic line hums with the charge of telegraphic contact. "I wonder by my troth what thou and I did till we loved"—there is no simplicity of statement here, rather Time itself squeezed by a transcendent nut-cracker. No, Tabb is not like that. His spiritual apprehension is so extremely refined, that he knows how to catch his flying vision into a material form that is neither too strait a prison nor too roomy a dwelling-place. "The Old Pastor" :

" How long, O Lord, to wait  
Beside Thy open gate ?  
My sheep with many a lamb  
Have entered, and I am  
Alone, and it is late."

And "Out of Bounds" :

" A little Boy of heavenly birth,  
But far from home to-day,  
Comes down to find his ball, the Earth,  
That sin has cast away.  
O comrades, let us one and all  
Join in to get him back his ball ! "

How easily might such a strain lapse into infantilism, and how the perfect spontaneity and poetic intentness preserve its beauty ! These little flames of aspiration seem to flow and bend into their own true and destined shape, almost without design. One feels in reading them how strangely, and with a grace of mutual dedication, the majestic and the familiar can concur, without shock, in the poetic sensitiveness. Tabb's felicity can indeed be self-conscious and deliberately applied, and he will sometimes

run in circles after the tail of a conceit. "Sicut in Principio" :

"A Pentecostal breath—  
The wind that baffles death—  
Moves : and from sterile sand  
The sea brings forth the Land,  
Out of whose wounded side  
All life is satisfied."

To me there is a touch of vulgar harlotry in this. Then, three or four pages later, I come upon this little beaten-metal charm of thought. "Noche Triste" :

"The night that bore me to my dead,  
Along the dreary way  
The meadow-frogs in chorus said,  
‘We sing the vanished day ;  
Think not that life is all with you  
*Her* night hath stars and voices too.’ "

Think of a mediocre poet *annotating* that into a hundred lines. Obviously concrete personification plays a large part in this esoteric song. The mysteries dance like sprites in the fairy ring of his imagination. And this modelling in clay is what, I think, endows them with their sharpness of quality and separate coherence. The conception of his poetic feeling gives you the impression of no end before it or immediately behind it. Born of tradition, they infect you with its still, mysterious holiness. The poems stand forth, complete and distinct in a kind of delicate solidity and substantial airiness. What I feel I cannot analyse is how a sometimes tenuous fancy can give his versification at once crispness and fullness.

Perhaps it is the sheer melody and pitch that give wings to the feet of his stanzas. Anyway, here is an instance in which sheer melody does all the work. "The Reaper":

"Tell me whither, maiden pure,  
Down the dusky slope of noon  
With thy sickle of a moon  
Goest thou to reap

Fields of Fancy by the stream  
Of night in silvery silence gleam  
To heap with many a harvest-dream  
The granary of Sleep?"

If I do find a fault in this charming combination of sounds it is in the lack of any "o" vowel in the second stanza.

Two points may be noted about Tabb's poetic method. He makes, in the first place, a conscious choice of epigrammatic forms, and, in the second, these forms in no way depart from literary tradition. His little workshop is, all the time, forging images and similes and figurative shapes, and then, to use an appropriate commercial idiom, turning out the finished article. He is, in short, an Imagist. He is another of our Quixotes of free verse—only he bides quietly at home. At any rate, I leave you to judge whether his images or theirs are gathered up into a poetic whole. I leave you to judge whether here at least is not a modern poet who has achieved, not only technique, not only composition, not only style, but—in his little way and with the help of his clear vision—their apotheosis, *creative form*.

## XXXVI

### A MODERN LYRIST

MY DEAR X,

Happy Dan Davies, how can I help writing about him? It is a pleasure to be on the slope of a hill and move the little pawns of fancy over the green chess-board below; it is a pleasure to write about Davies, to trite about Davies.

Because W. H. Davies is the easiest of poets to read and enjoy, so he is the most difficult to judge. He has published poetry steadily for ten years, and in 1916 gathered himself a harvest of his work, selected out of his eight volumes. Let that be the thymy bank for me.

What is one to say about such poems, the darling summer of Davies's genius? There is no possible ambiguity about them; there is no breach for an angry criticism to enter. Here are at least a score of poems of fine, fresh lustre and final accomplishment. What poet, since the death of Francis Thompson, dare say as much for his own? The very boundaries of Davies's poetic landscape make him secure within them. You do not gird at Campion because he is not Donne. Davies's metres have the fewest alterations and experiments of almost any poet in the language. His genius does not scale heavenly precipices nor take ship to unknown ports

of spiritual adventure. But if his muse is not blinded by heaven, neither does it look backwards. Why should it? On earth there are many Paradises, and Davies has made one and dwelt in it.

Only paradox can call him a poet of the intellect, or of discontent, or of speculation, or of prophecy, or of abstraction, or of sombre and imperial vision. But the unity of his mood and the felicity of his phrase are incomparable, and of so absolute a bridal in its definite creation and fulfilment that you forget not only the skill that fashioned but that these things are left out. Impalpable things he does not charm into being, but the green world is all about him, transfigured into an art rapturous in joy, candid in feeling, and perfect in outline. Life is not so simple as Davies makes it, but he makes us wish that it were. The number of his poetic themes may perhaps be counted on the ten fingers, but they are universal themes, and Sir Patrick Spens could understand them, and so (if he would open his ears) could a clerk or a stockbroker. His poetic expression, pungently individual as it is, is rarely subjective, and his emotion no more than superficially personal. They are so gladly and spontaneously absorbed into his art, they are so free from the particularities of egoism, so clear and conscious in workmanship, and so intimately allied with his subject and with himself, so far as he has projected himself into his subject, that their beauty is really objective. Just as Rembrandt's carriage is not simply a horseless carriage, but the significance, the emotion, the metaphysic of carriages as conceived by a draughtsman on a plane conveying a particular appeal; so Davies's skylarks and bees and laughing women are the concrete

embodiment of the reality of skylarks, bees, and laughing women, as it has always been since the beginning of the world, as it will always be until the end—until, that is to say, we have killed off the skylarks. In an obvious sense, his poems are not great ; in a deeper sense they are and will remain great, so long as human memory can last and so long as human beings become neither apes nor angels. Even putting his inspiration at its lowest and allowing his lyre but one string, his utterance comes so near to the sources of joy that surely while joy is a possession of humanity (and we have well-nigh lost it), so long will Davies belong to humanity.

But these are still commonplaces, just as the verdict of the age upon him is and must be a commonplace. We accept him as we accept no other of our poets, and as but very few of our poets will be accepted by posterity. There seems nothing for criticism to do but to refine, modify, regulate, or readjust that judgment—to make reservations or accretions of detail to it. Yet does not this detail possibly reveal a new Davies, an expanded Davies ? Consider his use of irony, for instance, in the first stanza of “ Ale ” :

“ Now do I hear thee weep and groan,  
Who had a comrade sunk at sea ?  
Then quaff thee of my good old ale,  
And it will raise him up for thee ;  
Thou’lt think as little of him then  
As when he moved with living men.”

That from the poet of naïveté ! It shows how he can come out of his shell and put up his horns. Indeed his economy of phrase is so exact and true that I should have

been surprised if he had never used irony—so wedded are the twain. An example of this crisp and sparing phrase—as though he were able to pay hard labour with small change—occurs in the enchanting lyric “*Plants and Men.*” Plants have first buds, then flowers, and berries last:

“ Sweet buds, fair flowers,  
    Hard berries then—  
Such is the life  
    Of plants and men.”

The human and general application of transience is reserved to and condensed in those last two words, “and men.” A model of swift transition. Surely economy could go no further. Something of the same masterly containment of words is achieved in the poem “*A Maiden and her Hair,*” where only in the last two lines of the last stanza is the maiden suddenly made living and expressive. In the rest of the poem it is her hands and hair that live, not she :

“ Now that her hair is bound secure  
    Coil top of coil in smaller space,  
Ah ! now I see how smooth her brow,  
    And her simplicity of face ”

Another characteristic which seals the masculinity rather than the sweetness of Davies’s numbers is the way he will shoot out a poignant and fiery phrase from the evenly beating and contented heart of his verse. “*The Hermit*” :

“ Or when the moth on his night-pillow beats  
    Such heavy blows, he fears they’ll break his bones ;  
Or when a mouse inside the papered walls  
    Comes like a tiger crunching through the stones.”

Or :

“ When under ferns fresh pulled I buried her,  
And called her forth like Lazarus from the grave.”

Or :

“ Still full of wild romance as in those days,  
Ere England launched her forests on the sea.”

Or :

“ I hear thy gentle whisper and again  
Hear ripples lap the quays of sheltered docks ;  
I hear thy thunder and it brings to mind  
Dark Colorado scaling his huge rocks.”

Or :

“ For fear the beauty of her face  
Made Paradise in flames like Troy.”

Or :

“ Then in a flash ! saw the Sea trying  
With savage joy, and efforts wild,  
To smash his rocks with a dead child.”

Not, mind, smash a dead child on his rocks, which is how an average rhymer would put it. What a magnificent terror that slight transposition effects ! Only one more of these too-tempting extracts :

“ He told us how he sailed in one old ship  
Near that volcano, Martinique, whose power  
Shook like dry leaves the whole Caribbean seas ;  
And made the sun set in a sea of fire  
*Which only half was his. . . .*”

I take the liberty of italicizing these last five words. They are the strong esoteric of poetry. Truly the sinews of the mighty line are still as robust as when Marlowe bathèd in the Thespian springs.

Allied to this power of striking down his subject like a hawk is his sparse use of comparison, except under sharp provocation. An inferior poet may very well be pinned down by the number of "likes" he uses. Davies does not say so-and-so is like so-and-so, but so-and-so *is* so-and-so. All great poetry pursues this shorter cut of identification, and the Bible is particularly rich in concrete personification : " My harpe also is turned to mourning and my organe into the voyce of them that weepe." This is a simple example :

"The Moon, that casts her beam  
Upon the hill's dark crest,  
Is Kitty's whiter arm,  
Across my hairy breast."

—not Kitty's arm which is whiter than, etc., or Kitty's arm is as white as the moon which, etc. But the process bores deeper than this :

"I think of that Armada whose puffed sails,  
Greedy and large, came swallowing every cloud."

How easily might that expressive directness be teased out into another half a dozen lines of imagery ! One remembers Shelley's "Skylark" where the lark has such a train of beautifully decorative similes that the mind becomes disorientated, the unity of the poem is lost in its detail, and the lark turns into a kite with a paper tail.

Another point which qualifies the conception of Davies

as the poet of simplicity and green lanes is his love of the strange and wonderful, sometimes even of the exotic. His poems of the sea, which are certainly among his finest, are salt with the spell of far continents ; their music and expression expand and flood those inward lakes on which "Sweet Stay-at-Home, Sweet Well-Content" plies her joyful little skiff :

"This sailor knows of wondrous lands afar,  
More rich than Spain, when the Phœnicians shipped  
Silver for common ballast, and they saw  
Horses at silver mangers eating grain."

Or :

"And how the sea's sharp needles, firm and strong,  
Ripped open the bellies of big iron ships ;  
Of mighty icebergs in the Northern seas,  
That haunt the far horizon like white ghosts,  
He told of waves that lift a ship so high  
That birds could pass from starboard unto port  
Under her dripping keel."

But perhaps the most interesting thing of all about Davies is his unconscious sense of literal tradition. (What a fetich it is with the man—I hear the faint voice of X, settling like a hawk down from the clouds.) Sometimes he seems to me like a flute, through which the lips of dead poets play their airs. His poetry seems comprehensible at first sight ; not complex, nor evasive, nor challenging to critical inquiry ; at the same time it can be strange and singular. What phenomenon is this of a poetry that walks straight out of the Elizabethan song-books into this questioning, weary, ratiocinative, mildewed age, where

everything seems to be at an end and where as yet there are but confused signs of a new beginning? Even our greatest modern poets have some concern with their age—either making it or being made by it, brazening it out or abusing it. Neither on his weakest nor on his strongest side has Davies any (his sympathy with the poor does not qualify the statement). Surely a derelict strayed from that age “when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy.” He is haunted with no doubts and pestered with no problems; he sings more cunningly than the thrush—but it seems to be with his unpremeditated rapture. Truly a robin “half-way up his legs in snow”:

“Robin on a leafless bough,  
Lord in Heaven, how he sings!”

For Davies has an extraordinary affinity with the poets of the Renaissance. Not only in theme or in melody or in the peculiar fluency and lyrical aptness of his song, but, without losing any individuality, in a very marriage of phrase. The first stanza of “The Weeping Child”—

“What makes thee weep so, little child :  
What cause hast thou for all this grief ?  
When thou art old much cause may be,  
And tears will bring thee no relief”—

expresses sentiment for sentiment, and not very far from word for word, Greene’s famous lines :

“Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,  
When thou art old, there’s grief enough for thee.”

At times he reminds one of Campion, at times of Heywood, at times ("Dreams of the Sea") even of Shakespeare. One catches in his unfaltering numbers strains of Marvell, of the Caroline lyrists, and very occasionally, and in a chance idiom, of Wordsworth. Yet all this is with him purely intuition.

It is a curious irony of time and a queer inversion of the legend of Tithonus. But I question whether this curiosity is not deceptive; Man, as artist, is ultimately always face to face with Life; the miseries and progresses which machinery and governments impose upon him are but externals. The past dies, and perhaps should die, but the universal poetic art of the past lives for ever, and asserts the brotherhood not only of countries but of centuries. Not the least part of the unforgettable service which Davies has done this generation is to present that past to us as a living reality in itself, a living and organic tie with the present, and a promise for the future.

All these things one feels about these lyrics and something more—good humour. He puts a man on terms with the world. The sun shines—there are a lot of dogs, warblers, and simple people in the world. One's generation is an invalid, not an ogre. There are not a few strutting people who do their best to turn it into an ogre, but they do not actually beat a *réveillé* on your door-knocker, though, by heaven, they soon will. Humanity is a farm-yard, and only the landowner exacts rent from it. And to my startled mind comes a conception of the attar of all Utopias and El Dorados and Avalons and Cockaignes and Thelemas. Why not leave humanity alone?

## XXXVII

### SUNDRY PROVERBS AND EPITAPHS

MY DEAR X,

Taking it for granted that you do not object to casual explorations amid the minor constellations "not quite so fair as many are," but each star with its own subdued lustre, I will in this letter remind you of Camden. A year or so ago I picked up for a couple of shillings "a fine tall copy" (to use the jargon of the booksellers) of "Camden's Remaines" (1637). I bought it because it was cheap, in excellent condition, and as a libation to the goddess Bibliophila. To read? Say to skate over. It was the piety of the collector rather than the voracity of the reader that disburdened my purse. Then a few weeks afterwards I took it out to have a look at it, much in the spirit of the late Pierpont Morgan handling a fifteenth-century German Commentary of the Apocrypha, clothed like a phœnix. And lo! Here was Harmsworth's Encyclopædia of Knowledge, except that it did not happen to be a Tinned Tabernacle for the Acolytes of Business Results. It contains such a variety of exciting material (Languages, Names, Surnames, Allusions, Epigrams, Ceremonies, Monies, Empreses—i.e. mottoes, Apparell, Artillerie, Wise Speeches, Proverbes, and Epitaphes are a few of the chapter headings) that I can only

indulge you—his posterity and now his happy contemporary—up to a certain point.

As an index of the professional mind, in the days when even Spenser and Sidney despised the “jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits” and caught the classical epidemic of quantitative metre, the following is interesting enough : “ Will you have Platoes wine ? reade Sir Tho Smith. The Ionides ? Sir Thomas Moore. Cicero ? Ascham. Varro ? Chaucer. Demosthenes ? Sir John Cheeke (the Rhetorician). Will you reade Virgil ? Take the Earle of Surrey. Catullus ? Shakespheare. Ovid ? Daniel. Lucan ? Martial ? Spenser, Sir John Davies, and others. Will you have all in all for prose and verse ? Take the miracle of our age, Sir Philip Sidney.” And on another page : “ What a world could I present to you out of Sir Philip Sidney, Ed. Spenser, John Owen, Samuel Daniel, Hugh Holland, Ben Jonson, Thomas Champion, Mich. Drayton, George Chapman, John Marston, William Shakespheare and other most pregnant wits of these our times whom succeeding ages may justly admire.” Can you see our etymological professors and spectacled thanes of Beowulf saying the same for Sturge Moore, W. H. Davies, Hodgson, Flecker, Housman, De La Mare and others ?

I pass on to the “ Wise Speeches.” They are not so profound and intelligible as they might be, partly because a good many are in Latin, partly because they chiefly emanate from Royalties. I confess myself to be “ over-gulled with self-loving ” to admire more than a few of them. This has a universal flavour : “ There was a poor blinde man in Warwickshire, that was accounted very cunning in prognosticating of weather : upon a day

Empson a great lawyer, as he road that way, said in scorne of his cunning, ‘ I pray you tell me, father, when doth the Sunne change ? ’ The old man that knew his corrupt conscience, answered : ‘ When lawyers go to heaven.’ ” One of Sir Thomas More’s : “ When the hangman (according to his manner) desired him to pardon him his death, hee answered ‘ I doe forgive thee with all my heart : but one thing I will tell thee ; thou wilt never have honestie in cutting off my head, my neck is so short.’ ” But that perhaps is on the roasted side. One is headed Religion : “ A Fryar, as he was preaching in the country, espied a poor wife of the parish, whispering with her Pew-fellow, and so falling angry thereat, cryed out unto her aloud, ‘ Hold thy babble I bid thee, thou wife in the red hood ’ ; which, when the huswife heard, she waxed as angry and sodainly she started up and cryed unto the Fryar againe that all the church rang thereon ; ‘ Marry, sir, I beshrew his heart that babbleth most of us both, for I doe but whisper a word with my neighbour here, and thou hast babbled there a good longe houre.’ ” And here one of Heywood’s Apothegms (whether John, Jasper or Thomas, I do not know—but probably John, the epigrammatist, many of whose quiddities Gabriel Harvey declares to be Sir Thomas More’s) : “ When a man of worship whose beere was better hopped than maulted (i.e. adulterated), asked him at table how he liked of his beere, and whether it were well hopped : ‘ Yes, by the faith of my body (quoth he) it is very well hopped ; but if it had hopped a little further, it had hopped into the water.’ ”

The chapter on proverbs is of the utmost value, because so many of them have been left to die by our cityfied

speech. Here are a few of the choicest that have so perished : "A close mouth catches no flies" (which I think occurs in Heywood's "Proverbs"—1562); "After meat, mustard"; "Age and wedlock tames man and beast"; "A shrew profitable may serve a man reasonable"; "A man will not lose a hog for a halfe penniworth of tarre"; this latter, with many others, occurs in honest, hay-scented, oak-timbered Porter's "The Two Angry Women of Abington," that robust, tender and salted comedy of English country life in which a minor Sancho called Nicholas discharges his volley of proverbs to the plenteous entertainment of the rest of the company. Drayton, too, has a curious sonnet stuffed with proverbs. I quote a few lines :

"In Love there is no lacke, thus I begin,  
 Faire words make fools, replyeth he againe,  
 Who spares to speake, doth spare to speed (quoth I)  
 As well (sayth he) too forward as too slowe ;  
 Fortune assists the boldest, I reply,  
 A hastie man (quoth he) ne'er wanted woe ;  
 Labour is light where Love (quoth I) doth pay,  
 (Sath he) Light Burden's heavy, if far borne ;  
 (Quoth I) The Maine lost Cast the By away :  
 You have spunne a faire Thred, he replies in scorne."

This is a dialogue between "Love and I" !

Florio, who loved words, as mothers love their children, Fabians the State, business men their profits, and old men war, was devoted to the proverb. "Ill may the kill (kiln) call the oxen burnt taile" is his version of the pot calling the kettle black. Euphues, too, is crammed full of homely proverbs, set like black currants in the plum-duff of the

narrative. "It is a blind goose that comes to the fox's sermon" is one of the best. Among too the multitude of books translated from the Italian at the Renaissance are many proverbial sayings and "Aphorismes." But to my Camden :

"A man will be a man though he hath but a hose on his head"; "As fit as a pudding for a Fryar's mouth"; "An ill cooke cannot licke his own fingers"; "Bare walls make giddy huswives"; "Better a louse in the pot than no flesh at all"; "Can Jack an Ape be merry when his dog is at his heele"; "Essex stiles, Kentish miles, Norfolke wiles, many men beguiles"; "He that hath but a little, he shall have lesse, and he that hath right nought, right nought shall possesse"; "He hath neede of a long spoone that should eate with the divell" (which I fancy just survives); "He that stretcheth out the sword, shall be beaten with the scabberd"; "He that will not be ruled by his owne dame, must be ruled by his step-dame"; "Jack would be a gentleman if he could speake French"; "It is better to kisse a knave than to be troubled by him"; "It is hard to wive and thrive both in a yeare"; "Many speake of Robin Hood that never shot in his bow"; "Might overcometh right" (this has a rare relish of antiquity); "No woman seeketh another in the oven which hath not before bin there"; "No penny no Pater Noster"; "Old men and far travellers may lye by authority"; "The cat knoweth whose lips she licketh well enough"; "The cat would eat fish and would not wet her feet" (probably a shortened fable like a cat's-paw and quoted as an "adage" in "Macbeth"); "There's more maids than Maukin"; "Who medleth in all things may shoe the

goslings ” ; “ Who so bold as blinde Bayard ” ; “ Wishers and woulders be no good householders.” Are they not the very gestures of a people’s life ?

I should like to give a much longer list than this ; as it is I will give you a few of Blake’s proverbs which fit themselves together automatically into much of his poetry : “ Always be ready to speak your mind and a base man will avoid you ” ; “ The fox condemns the trap, not himself ” ; “ The bird has a nest, the spider a net, man friendship ” ; “ What is now proved was once only imagined ” ; “ He who has suffered you to impose upon him knows you ” ; “ If others had not been foolish we should have been so ” ; “ The most sublime act is to set another before you ” ; “ If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise ” ; “ No bird soars too high that soars with his own wings ” ; “ A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.” How profound they are !—as adventurously true in their less sombre and despairing way as the poetic wit of the saturnine Ecclesiastes.

I should like to give a score of Heywood’s ; I should like to see if we moderns make them or simply keep the past fragmentarily alive (Asquith’s “ Wait and See ” has become a proverb, at any rate—“ Men, Money, and Munitions ” will perhaps become one, as a kind of nutshell of civilization). There are hundreds in Carew Hazlitt’s collection. And there is a fascinating list of foreign ones (translated) in D’Israeli’s “ Curiosities of Literature.” But if I so deviated, I should be nibbling not at cakes but at continents.

Happily a goodly number of the “ Epitaphes ” are in the vernacular. On Menalcas :

“Here lyeth Menalcas as dead as a logge,  
 That lived like a divell and died like a dogge ;  
 Here doth he lye, said I ? then say I lye,  
 For from this place, he parted by and by.  
 But here he made his descent into hell  
 Without either book or candle or bell.”

Which, as Camden kindly remarks, only proceeds from “an exulcerated mind.” A beautiful one on Prince Henry (by Daniel?) :

“Within this marble casket lies  
 A matchless jewel of rich prize  
 Whom Nature, in the worlds disdaine  
 But shewd and then put up againe.”

Not unlike Wordsworth’s “This child unto myself will take.” Camden does not include Ben Jonson’s noble epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke :

“Here beneath this sable hearse  
 Lies the subject of all verse.” And so on.

But he does not forget the wonderful brevity of Sir Henry Wotton’s on the wife of Sir Albert Morton—

“He first deceas’d ; she for a little tri’d  
 To live without him ; liked it not, and di’d”—

(though he does not mention either author or subject), or the exquisite lines of Raleigh and Chidick Tichborne on the nights before their execution in the Tower, which appear in Wotton’s “Reliquiae Wottonianæ.”

One of John Hoskins’ (who, you may remember, wrote a prefatory poem to Coryat’s “Crudities” and, by the way, another to Owen’s “Epigrams”) :

“Here lyeth John Cruker a maker of Bellowes,  
His craftes-master and king of good-fellowes ;  
Yet when he came to the houre of his death,  
He that made Bellowes, could not make breath.”

Another (and how apt !) on a usurer :

“Here lyes ten in the hundred  
In the ground fast ram’d :  
’Tis an hundred to ten,  
But his soule is damn’d.”

One on “A Puritanicall Lock-smith” :

“A zealous lock-smith dyed of late,  
And did arrive at heaven’s gate,  
He stood without and would not knocke  
Because he meant to picke the locke.”

Part of one on a shrew :

“And sure her soule is not in hell,  
The divell could ne’er abide her ;  
But I suppose she’s soared aloft,  
For in the late great thunder,  
Methought I heard her very voyce,  
Rending the clouds asunder.”

A pleasant doggerel quatrain on Thomas Churchyard, the poet :

“Come Alecto and lend me thy torch  
To find a Church-yard in the Church-porch.  
Poverty and poetry this tombe doth enclose  
Therefore, Gentlemen, be merry in prose.”

Camden does not include Marston’s self-epitaph “Ob-

livioni Sacrum," a really fine piece of pretentious bravado carried (for Marston posed all his life) gallantly into the grave. Nor that of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, who only missed being a great poet by a hair's breadth, not through lack of feeling, as Lamb suggests, but through sheer faultiness in composition. "Fulke Grevil, Servant to Queen Elizabeth, Councillor to King James, and Frend to Sir Philip Sidney. *Trophæum Peccati.*" How full of restrained pathos and nobility ! Penultimately :

"Here lies, the Lord have mercy upon her,  
One of her Majesties maids of honour ;  
She was both young, slender and pretty,  
She dyed a maid, the more the pitty."

And lastly, surely the briefest epitaph on record, that on Burbidge the tragedian : "Exit Burbidge."

It is the old spirit rejuvenated of Lucian, who brings in Diogenes "laughing and out-laughing" King Mausolus "for that he was so pitifully pressed and crushed with an huge heape of stones under his stately monument Mausoleum." Not so Camden, even though he thought it rather plebeian to write in English. Let me commend him to you, dear X, and "to such indifferent, courteous, modest readers as doe not think basely of the former ages, their country and countrimen." Most of the numerous "Remaines" in the seventeenth century are merely posthumous miscellanies of the authors (such as Spelman, Herbert, and Wotton). But Camden's are something different.

## XXXVIII

### EPILOGUE

MY DEAR X,

I suppose that I ought to close an epistolary series of this kind by making my epitaph—by putting the lid on the dustbin with a ringing slam. I suggest, then, a few platitudes worth reaffirming because we have forgotten them. The artist is an extremely important member of the community, and it makes for the salvation of the country that both the artist and the community be conscious of it. Germany has been educated in the wrong ideas ; we have been educated in none. No system of education, therefore, will affect the mentality and the happiness of our countrymen unless art, the Carter Paterson of ideas, circulates through the community.\* Art, however, can only flourish in a free community ; it languishes when “made tongue-tied by authority.” Even though for generations it succeed not in propagating good ideas but in destroying false ones, even though its office, that is to say, be purely critical, it will have done a work a thousandfold greater than the work of armies and politicians. Should it only check, for instance, the diffusion of those very up-to-date maxims—that it does not matter what you think but what you do, and that

\* *N.B.*—In other words, art and industry ought to be *the same thing*.

books and the art of the past are a contradiction of reality—it will have won a permanent though bloodless victory.

But the artist, though of his age, must at the same time be remote from it. His business is with God, with life, and with beauty, and only indirectly with their perversions in 1916. His art is there to adjust his relation with contemporary life, to teach him to get his period into the right perspective, and to maintain an equilibrium between his departure from and approach to it, between the past and the future and the present. This distance should aid him, in the first place, to form a style, irrespective of contemporary fashions, firmly but delicately measured to his ideas, and made cogent and harmonious by his inheritance from artistic tradition. It should, in the second place, supply him with that occasion for study and reflection, whose fruits will be gradually stored into general principles and convictions, into a philosophy, whether of art, moral ideas, or life, which will direct his imagination and give a backing, a meaning, and a purpose to his creative force. For he is of his age to form the taste of his age ; he is the messenger of order, sanity, freedom, and repose to a people stampeding within their iron pens.

But something there must be to hold the artist back from solidifying those general principles into a cold rigidity, into idolatry, into a nescience. I will give you an example of what I mean—not from art but from morality, which is more susceptible to icy formulations. How many irreproachable moralists have not of recent years erected the religious fetich of the State—with a hard, tenacious completeness that would have sent Hobbes

scurrying into individualism? To them, this State is not ourselves given a local habitation and a name, but (this is what it comes to) a Jehovah outside, demanding the last sacrifices of his subjects as fat for his nostrils. These moralists do not say what state, but the State. That is idolatry, and against idolatry all men of noble stamp have fought from Moses to Browning. But what is the reason of it? I conjecture the separation of principle from human feeling and imagination. It is the duty of the artist (and indeed of all good men) to reconcile the two, to test his general principles, his convictions, and his philosophy by the human equation. If they will not be reconciled, then it were better for this philosophy that a millstone were hanged round its neck and it were cast into the depth of the sea.

THE END

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